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**Dance to the Drummer's Beat:**  
**Competing Tastes in International B-Boy/B-Girl Culture**

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I declare that this thesis is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_  
Mary E Fogarty





# Dance to the Drummer's Beat: Competing Tastes in International B-Boy/B-Girl Culture

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the relationship between musical tastes and dance practices in a popular dance style known as breaking or b-boying/b-girling. It is based on a multi-sited ethnography involving the participation in and observation of the practices of breaking, as well as interviews with individual b-boys and b-girls, who often travelled between cities as part of their practices. Although there were many interesting and contradictory observations and participant responses provided by this multigenerational, multicultural scene, one theme emerged as central.

'Vernacular' or street dancers make consistent claims that "it's all about the music." This is to challenge assumptions in current academic writing on the relationship of music and dance. On one hand, many contemporary dance writers argue that musical tastes have little to do with choreographic practices and the meanings of dance performances. On the other hand, sociological accounts of musical tastes rarely consider dance practice in their analyses. The result is that musical tastes are under-theorised in accounts of dance performance, and vice versa. Hennion's (2007) assertion that taste is an activity provides a foundation for a new argument. I propose that taste is an activity that, when theorised in terms of music and dance practices, suggests new epistemological avenues for studies of popular dance. Put simply, I argue that, in breaking practices, dance is a performance of musical taste.

This performance of taste has a variety of avenues - from hip hop theatre performances, to international battles, master class workshops, club nights and local events – and in each new context, the relationship between music and dance transforms. These shifts in selection reveal that the dance is not just “about the music,” but also about how tastes are mediated, negotiated and competed over.





## Glossary of Terms

**Battle:** The competitive activity of the dance. To battle someone is to treat them as an opponent whose skills are going to be compared to your own.

Whether this is judged or not, everyone knows that it is a competition.

**Break:** The instrumental, percussive break of a song dominated by the rhythm section. The break occurs in most songs only once somewhere between a chorus and a verse.

**Breaking:** A term used interchangeably with 'b-boying/b-girling.' What the media once called 'breakdancing,' although this was an umbrella term given incorrectly to dances that originated on both the East and West Coasts of the United States (such as popping and locking). Breaking, in its original context of New York City, was not only a dance style, but was also a slang term to describe someone 'going off' or flipping out. B-boying/b-girling refers specifically to the act of breaking; a style where one 'goes down' to the floor to dance. This style has specific genre conventions and cultural practices, which include the music that it is typically done to: the instrumental break of a record.

**B-boy:** Someone who breaks. Originally in hip hop culture this meant a 'break boy': someone who 'gets down' (dancing) to the break of a record. In breaking culture, a b-boy is someone who does a style known as breaking or b-boying/b-girling or 'break dancing.' In some countries,

such as Germany, a 'b-boy' means a bisexual boy, which is a different meaning from what dancers mean. Similarly, in Toronto, Canada (in the 1990s) and in various cities in Japan, the local terminology of 'b-boy' means something other than a dancer. However, in international breaking culture, a b-boy is a male that breaks.

**B-girl:** a female that breaks. Same as above only used to distinguish the female sex of the participant.

**Biting:** Stealing or copying a move of another b-boy or b-girl without crediting the person or having permission from them to do their move.

**Cyphers:** The circle that forms in breaking when b-boys and b-girls are taking turns, sharing moves to music. The term 'cypher' is derived from rap music. Many of the early rappers were Five Percenters and the term 'cypher' was originally used by the Five Percent Nation. According to Miyakawa (2005), "Five Percenter theology is multiply grounded in Black Muslim traditions, black nationalism, Kemetic symbolism, Masonic mysticism, and Gnostic spirituality" and, "the Five Percent Nation's history is also tightly entwined with hip-hop's history" (5).

**Footwork:** The name used often to describe what is known to b-boys and b-girls as 'downrock.' This involves the steps done while the torso is close to the ground and generally involves hands touching the ground.

**'Rep':** This word has many meanings. 'Rep' is short for represent, and reputation. To rep in breaking may mean to perform as a sort of ambassador for your neighbourhood, your crew, or yourself. It's about

performances that signify, and can also mean when you participate by getting involved and *being seen*.

**Rocking:** A style of dance that evolved in the 1970s. This style of dance was practiced alongside breaking for a few years and then died out. Recently, the style of dance has had an international revival. The style became known as ‘uprock’ for many years, to distinguish it from ‘downrock’ and ‘toprock,’ both components of breaking. Rocking is a separate dance style.

**Toprock:** This is dancing one does before going down ‘to the floor.’ It’s upright dance, but not the ‘rocking’ style and not ‘uprock.’ Scholars in the past have got this all mixed up. The term will be clarified later in the thesis, but remains contested. As more knowledge comes to light, all of these street vocabularies are analysed, changed and challenged.

**‘To the floor:’** This is one way of talking about the moment in breaking when a b-boy or b-girl has finished dancing upright and begins dancing at a low level near to the ground. Downrock or footwork is one aspect of this, and one of the central defining characteristics of breaking.



## Section I: Introduction



## Chapter 1: Breaking Worlds

In 1984, Michael Holman suggested that in a (hypothetical) competition between a New York City b-boy and a b-boy from Moscow, the American b-boy would always win. The attitude, style, finesse and character of the dancer from New York City could be mimicked but never beaten because the knowledge was, arguably, tacit. He writes:

I predict that these Russian-influenced breaking moves will come full circle in the next couple of years as breaking breaks through the Iron Curtain. Russian gymnasts will completely dig it and pick it up as part of their gymnastic floor routines or as a separate sport. But don't worry, if there's a battle. The Bronx will brush Moscow for years to come. Why the confidence, you ask? After all, the Eastern Europeans started a lot of this stuff and always do very well at the Olympics, thank you. But the reason they could never take us out is because breaking happens on [the] funky beat of which Russians have no conception. (Holman 1984, 34)

Holman's prediction did not come true. In the finals at UBC<sup>1</sup> in Las Vegas in 2010, Top 9, a crew from Russia, beat Killafornia, a crew from the United States. However problematic Holman's argument may seem, he does make explicit some cultural assumptions that many adhere to. Dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996), for example, has argued that Americans dance better than Europeans. She suggests that this is due to the powerful influence of African American music and dance on all aspects of American culture: from fashion, through to contemporary and popular dance forms. Both Holman and Gottschild are making a judgement about dance practices and, in Holman's case, about the

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<sup>1</sup> Ultimate B-Boy Championship.



relationship between music and dance. But these judgements do not seem to be borne out by the facts.

By 2010, b-boy crews from South Korea and Russia were constantly going head to head in the finals of international breaking competitions, beating their American counterparts to make it there. At Battle of the Year (BOTY), an international breaking event, in 2009, Top 9 crew from Russia competed against the Gamblerz b-boy crew from South Korea in the finals, even with American b-boys and b-girls judging. What changed?

During the development of 'global hip hop culture', breaking has grown in and out of popularity. While the style faded out in the American media, new dancers emerged in Japan, Germany, France and the UK, preserving the traditions as they worked their way into the culture, often learning originally from mediated representations of the dance (Fogarty 2006), and then later from pilgrimages to New York City and master class workshops.

Breaking has also expanded its scope. Dancers appear now in hip hop theatre, on festival stages and at international competitions with corporate sponsors. They are judged by their peers and elders in battles, employed in schools to teach, and paid to appear in street dance films and music videos.

The aim of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive overview of the various contexts of breaking culture as an international phenomenon, centred on a consideration of the tastes and judgements that underpin the practice of the dance. Writers such as Francis Sparshott (1995) and Lydia Goehr (1992) have been concerned with how aesthetic experiences and musical meanings are thought about within historical and social contexts. In this dissertation, I thread

together two strands of research that are too often separated: music and dance, in order to consider how musical values relate to dance practice. This involves the restructuring of dance analysis around key issues of musical taste, musical competence and musicality that define both a break with conventional thinking about music and dance, and a new direction for the study of hip hop culture in dance and music studies.

This aim is both ambitious and challenging, on many theoretical and methodological fronts. To address such a many-sided practice, I have chosen to use both ethnographic and archival methods. In order to survey as many current contexts as possible, I conducted a multi-sited ethnography in which I met and followed key b-boys, b-girls and their crew members in various countries including Scotland, England, the USA, Canada, Germany and France. I observed how groups formed, practised, battled and interacted, and in doing so, honed in on the major focus of this project. Crews form across a fundamental axis of belonging which involves an aesthetic founded in both dance practice and musical tastes. This aesthetic, in its many manifestations, will be the central theme of the discussion. Having focused the thesis on the relationship between musical tastes and dance practices, I then located and investigated web-based repositories and some personal archives of individual dancers, in order to substantiate the discussion's historical aspects, and to show the effects of various forms of mediation on the central issues of taste and judgement.

This thesis charts some of the key progressions in the development of international breaking cultural practices. It does so from both sociological and historical perspectives, by, for example, observing how dancers from New York

City interact with dancers from South Korea on tour, and then situating the development of such tours in their historical context. When the New York City b-boys, having seen the show of their Korean counterparts, asked, “how can you rock the beat when there is no beat?” I would follow up such a comment with observations of the actual shows, the musical choices and the responses of audiences, DJs and dancers to such distinctions. These observations would then be checked against the available historical materials, in order to locate connections and developments. Through this investigation, I have tried to highlight and expose some of the contradictions, conflicts and competitions over meaning that are central to breaking practices and its multitude of contexts.

Judgement is a fundamental activity in breaking culture. B-boys and b-girls compete against each other and are judged by their elders. Who is better and who is worse? Who is *the best*? These issues become intricate and complex at the international level, especially now that events are judged by b-boys and b-girls, from various countries, who have been participating in this practice of popular culture from the late 1970s and early 1980s onwards, into the 1990s and 2000s. The history of these participants raises interesting questions for the analysis of hip hop culture in an international context, and judgement will be an important theme of this study.

Many of the accounts of the proliferation of rap music around the world have asserted that breaking was a part of the initial flourishing of hip hop culture in various countries (Mitchell 2001). These accounts have also acknowledged that their analysis of breaking, as a practice, is limited (Condry 2006). Most have focused instead on rap music, discussing the local flavour of

lyrics and accents that are considered a 're-working' of hip hop's aesthetic, to express a specific locality and experience of place (Mitchell 1996, 2001; Condry 2001; Forman 2002; Bennett 2004). Breaking, however, has aspired to an international aesthetic, while remaining an art form centred on competition. Competitions have fostered this international aesthetic, yet they have also begun to represent national, rather than locally situated identities. Crews, and judges come from different countries to judge who is the best in the world at any given time. These events are now significant commercial enterprises, and the organisers in Japan and New York City are sometimes working with big budgets of a million pounds (or two million US dollars).

These events rely on younger b-boys and b-girls to provide a continuing stream of new competitors, and teaching, in various contexts, is an important part of breaking culture. When older b-boys teach, they often use musical meaning in innovative ways to teach others about the dance. For example, in the 1990s b-boy, Ken Swift would draw attention to the lyrics of a song, "Dance to the Drummer's Beat", (Herman Kelly & Life) in his international teaching, when instructing younger b-boys about the local meaning of the dance for the New York City participants. This is significant because originally b-boys would dance only to the instrumental break beats, not paying much attention to the lyrics of the song. However, over time, the meaning of the lyrics has grown in significance in the sharing of this cultural form in cross-cultural exchanges. In my interviews with b-boys and b-girls from different countries, they often navigated their own personal histories within a wider context of musical meanings, relationships and exchanges, as is evident in this example. Where

these interactions have informed taste activities, I have paid special attention, as an important focus of interest for this project lies in how tastes are acquired, and how competing tastes are negotiated and understood by passionate and devoted practitioners.

Older dancers have also felt disempowered by the perception others have had of their age in connection to their ideals, feeling that various researchers who have come across breaking culture have treated them as ‘old guys’, stuck in their ways, unable to move forward. One older b-boy even had his student explain to me his contempt for the way he was positioned by a researcher’s account, because he felt that he was being dismissed. This brings up ethical questions about the types of judgement that can be made when researching music and dance cultures. The researcher’s position here clearly relates to what Pierre Bourdieu calls (1984) ‘social ageing’. Bourdieu suggests about participants in a different sort of world, place and time:

As they struggle to the peak of their career and the moment of self-assessment, feeling their values and even their conception of their job threatened by the arrival of new, more highly qualified generations bearing a new ethos, the oldest ... are inclined to conservative dispositions in aesthetics, ethics and politics ... To have their revenge, they only have to place themselves on their favourite terrain, that of morality, to make a virtue of their *necessity*, elevate their particular morality, into a universal morality (353).

Ageing will later form the focus of some detailed discussion, concerning the extending history of hip hop culture. However my aim with this project is not to map Bourdieu’s ideas onto international breaking practices, but to draw attention to the tension between the ‘international aesthetic’, now dominant in worldwide breaking practices, and the particular morality of ageing participants

from places other than New York City, who feel that their particular values are being lost in this new, 'internationalising' tendency towards a specific version of the 'foundations' of the dance, imagined as a preservation of New York history.

This 'foundation', which I will discuss in the coming chapters, is *not* an accurate depiction of the styles that came from New York originally, which were diverse and competitive, borrowing from many sources, but rather is a versioning of the dance by those few b-boys who have had the opportunity to teach worldwide. Although b-boys, such as Ken Swift, have studied, in a scholastic fashion, the styles of their fellow participants, crew members, and friends who died early, and have tried to preserve their essence in teaching, some of the original flavours of the dance are no longer present in this new, re-imagining of the 'foundations'.

Throughout this investigation, I sometimes borrow concepts that have emerged in cultural sociology, specifically those concerning the study of groups that make or appreciate art and entertainment. I do this not to make a 'low' form serious through the use of 'high' theory. Rather, I am interested in applying concepts as a reflection, and an awareness on my part, that borrowing and appropriation of movements and concepts has always been a 'two-way street' within hip hop culture. As an early writer on breaking, Sally Banes (1994), suggests:

...Western high art has always borrowed from folk and popular forms...scoring a quick hit of vitality just when things threaten to get over refined. You could look at the history of theatrical dancing, for instance, as a cyclical process that continually transforms vibrant social dances... But we sometimes forget that this kind of borrowing is a two-way street, ...Street artists borrow mainstream and avant-garde art. In dancing, steps and

styles move from theatre, film, and television to the street and back again (133).

Similarly, the concepts of academic investigations are quick to be absorbed and transformed in popular discussions and then fed back into the articulations, understandings and observations of breakers and vice versa. As a b-girl and an academic, I see these comparisons and borrowings as an ordinary part of my practices, that are not as dichotomous as one might imagine or construct. Also, as I am often identified by others as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider,' I address some of the challenges of my position in the research world in the various appendices that describe in further detail some of my field work and interactions with b-boys and b-girls internationally.

Some of the conceptual work that emerged from this project involved considerations of a number of related topics: dance as musical competence, crews and familial organisation, mediation and aesthetic migration, in/formal education structures and the institutionalisation of aesthetics. Rather than situating these accounts in a potentially related body of literature, such as the sociology of the family or of sport, these materials are approached through descriptions attached to specific moments of observation. Finally, these descriptions point to a variety of possible avenues of theorisation, and my concern has been to raise the issues and topics for investigation as they presented themselves, rather than to follow just one argument to its neat and organised theoretical completion. With a culture and practice that mutates instantaneously, in a performative way, whenever observed, this strategy

provided the best way to capture the moments where breaking demands uncertainty.

#### Break Down of Chapters

Section I of the thesis introduces the principal themes and contexts of the whole project. In Chapter 1, I have provided an overview of the main themes of the thesis, analysing the relationships between musical tastes and dance practices. I have chosen to look at international breaking culture in order to examine how meanings are negotiated, mediated and competed over in a dance practice that is centred on musical tastes.

Chapter 2 covers the literature to date about breaking and hip hop culture in a general way, in order to situate the themes of the project. I also contextualise my analysis of breaking as an 'art' worthy of serious aesthetic consideration.

In Chapter 3, I introduce my own background as a dancer and describe the various methods and choices I made during this research. I also consider the methodological implications of my approach, drawing on the available literature about multi-sited ethnography and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988).

Section II of the thesis is entitled, "Collective Standards," and here I move from individual expressions about music towards collective standards and agreements. Chapter 4 sets out to consider individuals' articulations about musical tastes and competences. Key informants, both DJs and dancers, explain how their musical tastes have impacted on their practice. In doing so, they also reveal how their dance practice has informed their thinking about music.



In Chapter 5, I develop a sociological understanding of crews, the small units of belonging that organise social relationships in breaking worlds. Crews are then explored as multigenerational and multicultural social formations through the analogy of the 'extended family'.

Chapter 6, "Towards an International Aesthetic," moves from the notion of local crews, to international infrastructures and developments. The significance of changing roles for ageing participants is described to account for the development of increasingly formalised networks and judgements. Here I address new meanings and values that are formed through exchanges amongst dancers, and that build over time, as well as examining the ways that these challenge and transform aesthetic experiences of the dance for participants. In order to explore these meanings and values, the *work* of dance practice is situated within these new formations.

Up until this point, the chapters have set up the sociological frameworks necessary for a solid understanding of international networks, Section III, "Dance as a Performance of Musical Tastes," juxtaposes *contexts* where musical tastes are performed in dance practices, namely: master classes, hip hop theatre and video mediations. Each chapter situates its particular context, both historically and socially.

In Chapter 7, I consider how musicality and musical competences are learned in the cross-cultural context of master classes. These generally involve expert teachers with younger b-boys and b-girls. Here, dance education involves both formal and informal lessons and approaches, which are subsequently compared to recent studies in music education.

In Chapter 8, the history of hip hop theatre is described and analysed in terms of cultural policy and institutional support, involving comparisons of national differences and exchanges. I draw attention to the emerging body of literature on this subject, as well as adding my own case study of Breakin' Convention, the largest international hip hop theatre festival that takes place mainly at Sadler's Wells in London, England. Some local theatre performances, in Los Angeles, U.S.A. and Edinburgh, Scotland that took place between 2007-2009, are also discussed, as comparative contexts.

Chapter 9 explores the values and meanings ascribed to videos produced by dancers in the 1990s, paying specific attention to not only their production and reception, but also to their circulation and significance as historical archives. I situate these videos alongside other forms of technological mediation, including sound recordings and early movies, and conclude with an argument about the significance of *face-to-face* mediation in a now international art form. Each of the chapters in this section draws out the changing relationship between musical tastes and dance practices as mediated by different contexts.

Section IV, "Criteria for Judgement," focuses on the arena where judgements are made explicit, authority is asserted and reputations are both established and contested: international b-boy/b-girl competitions. Chapter 10 is devoted to explaining the slow constitution in breaking worlds of international standards of judgement. I describe some of the first attempts, in recent years, to standardise the judging at international competitions, and the approaches of participants who are at the forefront of this effort.

In Chapter 11, I consider how competitions are promoted and represented on websites. I argue that this online presence reveals key insights into how reputations are established in hip hop culture as well as showing the role of Internet communications in mediating the debates within breaking practices.

The final section, "Conclusions," summarises the major themes of this thesis, and integrates issues of taste and judgement with those of responsibilities to others. The notion of the 'extended family' is revisited to highlight the significance of both formal and informal education in this spectacular performance of musical tastes, known to its devoted participants, and legion of supporters as b-boying and b-girling.

## **Chapter 2: Hip Hop Culture, Then and Now (Literature Review)**

This chapter provides an overview of academic accounts of hip hop culture that discuss breaking explicitly in their analysis. Analysis of hip hop culture has been dominated by the literature on rap music, although in the past few years there have been attempts to focus on breaking (Rivera 2003, Ogaz 2006, Schloss 2009). Here, particular attention is paid to the considerations of music, and of social groupings addressed in these accounts. The literature on hip hop theatre will be covered separately in Chapter 8, and I also leave to one side the analysis of dance in music videos, as this body of writing informs the contents of Chapter nine specifically and will be situated there. In setting up some of the themes of this dissertation, this chapter works to articulate a preliminary analysis of the meaning of the dance in places other than where it originated in New York City. It also sets up some of the theoretical models given to frame discussions of taste and judgement, as well as considering the mediation, dissemination or appropriation of breaking in various countries.

### **Histories and Generations**

One of the major shifts that can be identified in the academic work on hip hop culture, and on breaking more specifically, has to do with generational hierarchies. Put more succinctly, when people first began to look at breaking practices, those observing the dance were older than the participants

themselves. Early writers such as Sally Banes (1986), alongside photographer Martha Cooper (2006), were looking at children at play on the streets in New York City. These writers described the form by putting the dance into a historical context of dance traditions and social forces that remained beyond the scope of the practising b-boys at that time. The b-boys, however, had their own insights and expertise on the rules of their practice: how to battle, mentor other b-boys, stay in or out of trouble, and impress onlookers through their comedic character or charms. As time has gone on, these insights and expertise have become articulated, as b-boys such as Ken Swift and Alien Ness have toured the world providing classes, presenting showcases, judging events, answering questions about the history and verifying accounts by other dancers along the way.

Now, the majority of researchers who look at the dance are, in fact, *younger than the original participants* – including the pioneering DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc and others. This has had a dynamic effect on the research. The older generations of b-boys have an explanatory capacity and self-reflexivity that positions them, quite evidently, in the role of expert informants, and they have shared their viewpoints, as part of their teaching of younger b-boys and b-girls, in such a way that even b-boys in their early 20s discuss the dance in a shared discourse that began before their own experiences with hip hop culture.

In one academic account of the early time period, a Canadian master's student, Stephen "Buddha" Leafloor (1988), a practising b-boy himself, created a video document of his peers and other practitioners around the world, in a

comprehensive tour of worldwide practices. At this time he was younger than the pioneering dancers but older than many of the youth participants.

The early accounts of breaking, as historical documents, record the intersection of theoretical viewpoints available at the time (for example, the CCCS<sup>1</sup> definition of 'subcultures'), with discourses about the dance (such as 'breakdancing') and the voices of youth participants. These participants were often marginal youth, and their accounts were mainly preserved or witnessed by much older journalists and researchers such as Sally Banes who used very different language. These early studies of breaking make clear the value of anthropological descriptions of youth culture, and their historical utility for future studies such as this one. In this thesis I preserve the language used at the time, to maintain historical accuracy about the way that breaking was understood, not only by 'insiders,' but also by the 'outsiders' with whom they interacted and who helped to shape hip hop into an international phenomenon.

My own aim is to move the literature about breaking away from a situation in topics of youth culture and towards a serious engagement of breaking as an art form and as an aesthetic experience more broadly. This is a shift towards an 'aesthetic' analysis, to supplement the well-formed anthropological and sociological accounts of youth participants. By aesthetic, I mean to access issues of content, form, balance, expression, structure and an interaction with a tradition. Breaking possesses these qualities when performed to a high level and those experiences are grounded in pleasure. In thinking

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was a research centre at the University of Birmingham, UK, founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964.

about a 'popular' art form as a worthy aesthetic experience situated in the body, pleasure, and 'interestedness' (as opposed to disinterestedness), I am following the tradition of writers such as Simon Frith (1987; 1996), Richard Shusterman (1992), Sarah Thornton (1995) and Ben Malbon (1999). This is part of a larger project in the social sciences and humanities: for social scientists to talk about the 'work itself' (Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006).

The notion of breaking as an 'art', with performances equivalent to 'works', is riddled with perplexity in all of its mediated manifestations. Some of the mediations are personal to this researcher and require some observations, in keeping with the tradition of reflexive ethnography. For example, the underlying assumption that breaking is an 'art' worthy of aesthetic attention was a value judgement that I initially brought to the study through my own practice and appreciation of the dance as a participant and witness. Through my 'insider' participation in this particular dance world, I had "artistic competence" (Bourdieu 1993, p. 221). In other words, I had knowledge already of the codes and conventions of the dance and had judged many performances to be the most valued of any of my aesthetic experiences of art. My investment in this judgement is also attached to a preference for breaking to be appreciated on its own terms, with its own aesthetic, whilst recognizing the many influences from various discourses that have informed the development of the dance. The major issue here is that breaking history is not currently organised around 'works' of art, and is thus unable to borrow effectively from the various institutional supports and theorisations devoted to art for which 'works' are central.

The internationalisation of breaking practices, and the similar fracture of analysis, however, provide a testing ground for an analysis of art that, curiously, moves within and beyond the national discourses that writers such as Dewey (1934) attribute to the very emergence of the initial 'art' concepts. In this project, I therefore borrow Dewey's conceptualisation of art as 'experience.' This model, expanded by writers such as Shusterman (1992) and Frith (1996) to consider popular forms, allows for a closer reading of how breaking practices are organised as art experiences, shared between participants. If anything, my project argues for a view of art that builds from another realm (as experience), mediated by popular culture, and my informants in the case studies that follow this chapter shape this analysis as architects of hip hop culture rather than as artefacts of it.

### The 'Art' Turn

At a recent Pioneers workshop, organised by the Sadler's Wells' Breakin' Convention team and hosted by Edinburgh's national dance centre, Dance Base, I asked a veteran b-boy when people began to call breaking 'art.' I wanted to know when dancers began to self-identify as artists, rather than that definition being a label provided by outsiders looking at the cultural practice. After some thought, he answered that he started to call breaking 'art' after the year 2000. From what he could remember, he was inspired by reading Bruce Lee's (1997 or 1998<sup>2</sup>) book that had art in the title.

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<sup>2</sup> There are two, and he could not remember which it was.



The question of when and how breaking can be considered 'art' by outsiders is crucial for unpicking some broader societal constructions about practice and meaning, and this issue is taken up by French sociologist Roberta Shapiro (2008) in her analysis of 'la danse hip hop' on French stages. These concerns relate to future discussions about musical tastes and dance practice. However, my interest in how breaking battles and competitions are considered 'art' by insiders and outsiders is the arena where this matter takes on new meanings. Competition is rarely associated with 'ideal' descriptions of art and I am interested in how a competitive aesthetic is constructed and enforced by participants. A comparison with interpretations of 'black music' within a rock music discourse demonstrates what Simon Frith (1983) calls a "paradoxical mediation." He writes:

This becomes obvious in the late 1960s when rock fans, in claiming their music as art, began to *differentiate* white musicians' practices from those of black musicians. What had previously been considered the "liberating" possibilities of black music – its rhythmic emphasis, its physical expressiveness, its spontaneous account of emotion – were considered now to put limits on what could be said.

The assumption was that while black music was important as an expression of vitality and excitement – was, in other words, "good to dance to" – it lacked the reflective qualities needed for genuine *artistic* expression...

This position assumes a straightforward distinction between mind and body. Black music, as "body music", is therefore "natural", "immediate", "spontaneous". Art, by contrast, is something deliberately created, self-consciously thought, and involves, by definition, complexity and development. (21)

What is special about breaking in comparison to this treatment of rock culture, is that b-boys and b-girls of a variety of ethnicities, but predominantly non-

white, are invested in talking about breaking battles and cyphers (not just choreographic stage performances in theatres) as aspects of an art form worthy of aesthetic considerations. The vitality of this claim is rooted in both the competitive format of events and what this suggests about assumptions at the root of aesthetic theory itself, as well as the attempts by dancers to move towards making the dance style 'legitimate' in society at large.

The following is an exploration of the various ways that academic scholars have approached the study of hip hop culture's primary dance component: breaking, or b-boying/b-girling<sup>3</sup>. I frame this discussion around the overarching question of when people started to discuss breaking as an art form. In doing so, I note a gap in the literature so far, filled by relating the question of art to an analysis of the competitive criteria of the dance, involving the notion of musical competence. This will have implications later on for my analysis of how breaking competitions are judged, how hip hop theatre is presented on stage, and the relationship between musical tastes and dance practice in both of these contexts.

If the various accounts - competing, fragmentary and often incorrect - surrounding breaking have paid attention to different aspects of the dance, then they have done so in a way that has also informed, shaped and motivated the practice of the dance itself. All of these accounts, and their academic analyses, have in fact had an impact on the everyday understandings of the dance that circulate around the globe. That so many of the writers about the dance have

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<sup>3</sup> I am going to alternate between the terms *breaking* and *b-boying/b-girling* to describe a particular style of movement and its accompanying musical soundtrack.

also served as dance critics, social workers, journalists, musicians and dancers themselves, explains this circularity and cyclical rotation of knowledge.

#### “Experimental Laboratory”

Most of the early accounts of hip hop culture, and of breaking’s situation within that culture can be positioned within the context of subcultural theory<sup>4</sup>. In this reading, hip hop, as a ‘subculture’, is seen as a symbolic resistance of youth against their parents; a resistance which is then appropriated by the media as a commodified ‘youth culture’<sup>5</sup>. Hip hop culture, in these early accounts, is made up of four elements: emceeing, breaking, graffiti and DJing<sup>6</sup>. Steven Hager (1984) describes hip hop as an “experimental laboratory”, and from his account, breaking fits within art discourses of originality and multicultural influence. As Hager writes, “[Hip hop] has created an art form so original and vital that black and Hispanic artists have gained access to the established New York art world for the first time” (103). This was as true for breakers in the dance world as it was for graffiti artists in the galleries at this time.

As noted by Hager, the first article about breaking to appear was in the *Village Voice* on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1981, written by Sally Banes. The title of the piece was, “To the Beat Y’all: Breaking is Hard to Do,” and it alludes to both the lyrics of early recorded hip hop songs such as Lady B’s (1979) classic, “To the Beat

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Hebdige 1979.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Fogarty 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See the interview with Afrika Bambaataa in the recent documentary *The Freshest Kids* (Israel 2002) for an example of how the ‘elements’ of hip hop culture have expanded to include knowledge, peace, love, unity and having fun.

Y'all", and to the difficulty of the dance. For a relatively short article, Banes (1981) managed to set the agenda for some of the key debates and distinctions in the culture that are relevant to this day. For example, she pointed out that different dance styles were popular in different regions of New York City. B-boys from the Bronx and Manhattan began to distinguish their style, from rocking, as what they called 'uprock', a style that was also distinct from breaking. Breaking, in her account, developed alongside a particular music: "as the beat of the drummer came to the fore, the music let you know it was time to break down, to freestyle" (122). However, she suggested that, "...breaking isn't just an urgent response to pulsating music. It is also a ritual combat that transmutes aggression into art" (122). In this description of the dance, and in what follows, Banes describes the all-encompassing dedication of the dancers, who often retired by the age of sixteen. Breaking is an art comparable to martial arts where combat and aggression have become something disciplined, innovative and transcendent. Although Banes draws attention to the 'combat' of the dance, she never addresses the implications of this competitive format for theorisations of art.

By 1986, Sally Banes was describing hip hop as a 'subculture' that had already spread around the globe, and she had adopted the rhetorical label of 'breakdancing' that was a part of the familiar lexicon for the dance by this time. In a moment of self-reflection, Banes admitted that because of breaking's, "close relationship with the media, the observers and recorders of the form – myself included – are willy-nilly participants, since they have had such an enormous effect on its meteoric history" (126).

Although the first photographs of breaking appeared in the *New York Post* in 1980, taken by Martha Cooper, she and journalist, Sally Banes were able to contact more b-boys for a story through Henry Chalfant (Banes 1986). Footage from this time period<sup>7</sup> reveals the Rocksteady Crew's young members demonstrating a competition that involved the four elements Banes had described previously: entry, footwork, freeze and exit<sup>8</sup>. In comparison to the dance today, most of the 'exits' of this time remained under-stylized and similarly never demonstrated 'completion', as b-boys always planned to go another round. Banes recalls:

Though in certain ways breakdancing as a pastiche of popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s – with its references to TV, Playboy, comic books, kung-fu films, and even the spinning turntable – seemed utterly new, in other ways it was clearly a direct descendant of African and Afro-American dance traditions, from its format (a solo performer inside a ring) to its rhythmic structure (syncopated), to its movement vocabulary (the leg wobbles of Charleston, the acrobatic spins of black dance from Africa to the flash acts of New York nightclubs, the mimed freezes), to its rhetorical modes (the boast and the insult), to its function (male exhibition and competition). (Banes 1986, 128)

At that time, many of the moves Sally Banes was describing were 'signature' moves by particular b-boys that became influential. For example, Frosty Freeze's Charleston steps in his toprock<sup>9</sup> were comical and confident. He

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<sup>7</sup> This film footage has recently surfaced from the attic of one of the photographer's ex-partners. Ken Swift was able to use this footage at the recent pioneers workshops that he delivered in Edinburgh, Scotland and which I attended (summer 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Entry is how a dancer enters the circle, and mainly involves toprock (what dancers do standing up: resembling boxing steps and mannerisms during this time period) and the step the dancer does to get down (i.e. Coin drop, spin down, etc.). Footwork is the dancing done with hands touching the ground and legs moving around the torso (i.e. 6-step, 3-step, CCs, etc.). A freeze is any pose that is held for a few seconds for effect. The more difficult, original and stylish the freeze, the more it is well-received. Exit is the way the dancer gets up and leaves the circle.

<sup>9</sup> The upright dance component in breaking.

had a 'swagger' that fell off beat with the music and in doing so managed to look even funkier. Kung fu films inspired the character of dancers at that time. The performance ethos of getting ready to battle, that came through even in the 'b-boy stance,' the way a dancer stood on the side of a circle waiting for the battle to begin, was already 'in character.' Importantly, the link to the past traditions of African-American dance styles are still evident in the dance to this day, alongside many other fusions of styles influenced by salsa merengue, and social, party dances featured on Soul Train. The groove displayed in the torso (and the chest) regardless of the footwork steps is rooted still in these earlier forms.

Alongside being "a pastiche of popular culture," breaking quickly became a *part* of popular culture, featured in documentaries, live performances, and movies including *Wild Style* (Ahearn 1983) and *Flashdance* (Lyne 1983). Young dancers in New York City explained that they were beginning to learn the dance style not through face-to-face encounters, but rather from television. Around this time, films presented breaking alongside electric boogaloo<sup>10</sup>, and the two forms were given the umbrella term of 'breakdancing.'

Notably, breaking was a style invented by young people who were heavily influenced by popular cultural forms: "television, movies, radio, and video games" (Banes 1986, 132) and these stylistic influences provided a, "relationship between the dance form and the mass media" that was, "densely

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<sup>10</sup> In Banes' article she refers to the Electric Boogaloo style of dance as 'electric boogie'. The Electric Boogaloo style was developed in the 1970s by a group called the Electric Boogaloos who continue to dominate the world market in the teaching, and branding, of this style and its signature moves. The style is closely related to popping and considered to be part of the hip hop and funk dance family of styles.

layered, beginning with the use of pop culture imagery and with brevity of format, and evolving with the succession of responses to media coverage and dissemination". In her concluding thoughts about this mediated relationship, Banes argues, "these kids' sensitivity to – and sophistication in the use of – the popular media is essential to the nature and development of this urban folk dance" (132).

Although Banes relates breaking moves and styles to African American traditions she is careful to acknowledge that the youth are also incorporating influences and aesthetics from other cultures through mediated representations and narratives (such as kung fu films). Michael Holman (1984) also relates the dance to traditions in African American dance styles, from popular dance contexts such as circuses, carnivals and minstrel shows. He referenced already apparent, cross-cultural exchanges between travelling dancers in these historical accounts, reminiscing that, "In New York, 1915, during the Vaudeville years, a Black tap dancer named Dewey Weinglass, after seeing a Russian dancer Ivan Bankoff at a Broadway theatre, started experimenting with Russian steps" (34). Similarly, he pointed to the contributions of b-boys of black and Puerto Rican descent, alongside novelty white male youth, such as Mr. Freeze who was originally from France.

One of the key aspects of breaking's mediation was its almost instantaneous proliferation in many different first world countries at around the same time in the early 1980s. There were young people and adults taking up the dance style in places such as Japan, the USA and Europe (Rose 1994). Like some of the younger dancers in different parts of New York City at that time,

they were learning from what they saw on music videos, television shows and movies, supplemented by hip hop music's exposure on the radio. Dancers from New York City also went on tour with rappers to different parts of the world, including the UK and France.

Canadian b-boy, Stephen "Buddha" Leafloor (1988) who travelled widely during the mid-1980s, revealed networks that were already forming between cities such as Paris, France; London, England and Copenhagen, Denmark. In his own travels, he visited Morocco, Paris, and London, documenting footage of graffiti art and getting to know dancers from various places, as well as visiting documentary book writers such as Henry Chalfant<sup>11</sup>. Arguing from a position deeply entrenched in the subcultural theory popular at the time, from Dick Hebdige (1979), to Michael Brake (1985) and Stanley Cohen (1980), Buddha broke new ground in his multi-sited participant observation, as well as providing highly mediated representations of hip hop as a 'subculture' filled with contradictions and possibilities for youth voices in the face of ethnic and class inequalities. He observed how the dance came to Ottawa, Canada from the media and also, "quickly spread to London and Paris". In England it was taken up by predominantly black youth, and Brixton, an area of London largely populated by black people, in the midst of a very tense cultural situation climaxing in riots against the police in the spring of 1981, also became an area where breaking flourished as a subculture.

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<sup>11</sup> Chalfant and Prigoff's (1987) book, *Spraycan art*, alongside Cooper and Chalfant's (1984) book, *Subway art*, are cult classics in hip hop culture.



Although Leafloor (1988) argued that the form was, “heavily commercialised through mass media”, he also acknowledged different scenes as being either ‘underground’ or, in the case of a news story about Soviet Georgia, “so officially recognized, [that the] youth league of communist party sponsors competition.<sup>12</sup>” He argued that as hip hop spread through the media, its import provided “similar answers” for young people in various parts of the globe. The two examples he provided of this were Berlin, where Turkish male youth dominated in the dance style, and the Native Maori youth in New Zealand who were also an ethnic minority facing racial inequalities, and who took up the dance in meaningful ways.

One of the early anthropological accounts of breaking was a case study conducted in 1984 of what was called, ‘breakdance’. In this study, Tania Kopytko (1986) described her position as both an insider and an outsider to the experiences of breakdancers in Palmerston North, New Zealand. She identified two groups that defined this practice: those inside the culture and those outside the culture, and she is quite clear in indicating that their perceptions about the dance varied in each case. Already by the time of her account, breaking was being characterised as an ‘international’ culture, and the first exposure of b-boy culture emerged around 1983 through Auckland, the “major gateway to Polynesian and international traffic” (21). Notably, Kopytko observed that her informants, predominantly Maori or Pacific Islanders, did not use the terminology of “hip hop culture”, although the dance, fashions, technologies, and

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<sup>12</sup> His presentation is a video document and this is a quotation transcribed from the video soundtrack.

practice of writing graffiti were all imported. It is clear from her account that she positioned breaking as an 'art form', alongside other elements of hip hop culture. However at this time, the New Zealand youth were prone to describe 'breakdance' in relation to sport, rather than in relation to dance or art.

What is evident in a review of the early literature is that those from the art world: dance critics, involved in the shaping of breaking culture into an international phenomenon, began to consider breaking as an 'art form'. This discourse coincided with, and indeed seemed motivated in some ways by the relationship between breaking and graffiti art, at that time being seen in art galleries. It also related to breaking's resemblance to African American dance styles of the past, that were already being engaged with as 'art' dance on theatrical stages. The situation of the arts in the USA in the early 1980s, and the popularity of pop artists such as Andy Warhol, possibly assisted this celebration of popular cultural forms, not only as inspiration for consecrated artists, such as Warhol, but also as arts on their own terms. In comparison, those accounts such as Kopytko's study, that focus on the anthropological aspects of youth culture - predominantly that of ethnic minorities who are being assimilated, problematically, into educational systems and urban centres dominated by white people - do not place so much emphasis on the dance as 'art'. They are more concerned with the way the identities of the participants are fractured by social forces, and with the 'resistance' of young people who identified with the oppression of African Americans represented in movies, or in other media. These accounts foreground the tension between discourses of art and sport.

## Losing Extended Families

This second theme, of youth resistance, is situated firmly in family life and takes up particular significance in Kopytko's writing. Family will be another key notion addressed later on in this dissertation. When discussing the Maori breakdancers in the historical and social context of New Zealand, Kopytko (1986) raised the question of the role of extended families in cultural acquisition. She wrote:

Traditionally the Maori people were rurally based and divided into tribes (iwi), which were further divided into subtribes (hapu) and extended family groups. The extended family was central to the social structure, and it was within these families that the grandparents, in particular, educated young children in "Maoritanga," Maori culture and values (Buck 1966: 358). The 1950s was a time when New Zealand experienced prosperity and major economic growth. Industry developed rapidly, and there was a need for skilled and unskilled labour in the towns. Attracted to the possibilities of wealth, opportunity, new housing, etc., many younger Maoris began moving to urban areas. The impact of this influx did not go unheeded, and the government adopted a policy of "assimilation" to the dominant white or Pakeha culture. This meant that Maori people were encouraged to forget their Maori culture and become "New Zealanders." In many instances Maori children were forbidden to speak Maori at school and punished if found doing so. The extended family network began to break down as families were separated into nuclear units (23-24).

This description of the importance of the extended family to issues of education and culture, and the loss of these structures as young people moved to cities where they were expected to assimilate into other cultural norms, is crucial to the arguments I develop in the latter half of this thesis. Kopytko provided one of the few considerations of family life in these early accounts.

In a study from around the same period, researcher Denna Deyhle (1986, 1998) recalled how Navajo and Ute youth got into breaking, but eventually

found, “it didn’t work” (1998, 5) and started to listen to metal music instead. Just like the Maori, the Navajo youth faced racial discrimination from white people in the Anglo community, yet no longer had access to their ancestry. Deyhle argued, after interviewing a Navajo teacher, that the young people were not caught between two worlds; an excuse given by institutional educators not taking responsibility for the poor achievements of their students in school, but rather, as the Navajo teacher expressed, “... we all live in one world” (6). This articulation of a shifting metaphor, from two opposing worlds, to one, complex world, is set up to release young people from the double bind, or dichotomy of their affiliations. Deyhle writes:

This flat and static view of two worlds also ignores complex cultural shifts in American Indian societies, creating a stereotypic traditional culture. Indian youth’s lives reflect a variety of cultural contexts, and often, the traditional life of their grandparents is a thing of the past. The assumptions that Indian youth can merge these worlds and become bicultural/bilingual people also ignores the reality that the world of the Anglos is only marginally available to them as a choice because of poverty, racism, discrimination, and lowered teacher expectations, regardless of their potential for their success. (11)

Alongside these perspectives on ethnic inequality and its relation to family identification and educational aspirations, one of Leafloor’s interviews, with a white b-boy from Ottawa, Canada at around the same time period, emphasises the difficulties in being raised in a one parent family. It shows the anger felt at often being excluded from social groups, as well as the struggles involved for the b-boy’s family. From what begins as an explanation of breaking as the acquisition of new skills, Leafloor’s informant moves to personal descriptions. He explains that his involvement, as a white youth wanting to

break, was laughable to outsiders at first because he was not black, but that this changed over time. Continuing, he explains:

All these people were good at nothing. I've seen people grow from breaking to dancing to gymnastics to football. It sort of was the seed to find like ... the seed that my young generation like where they grew up and said, hey look I'm a dependable person. It gave me that thing where I could show up on time, be very punctual, like I said it took on a lot of different things ... It was changing me inside. I didn't even know it was. My personality was changing. I mean a perfect example, ... I remember [when I was] really small going to school dances and I would never dance, shy, timid. I wouldn't do anything because I was scared people were looking at me ... but I did something totally bizarre like breaking. People were looking at me but they were appreciating me. Hey look, if they can appreciate me when I'm doing this, imagine if I dance normal. It's not so bad. And now I dance in clubs ... (Buddha 1988: interview with Wayne Lacasse, Floor Masters).

Similarly, in Dehyle's (1998) study with Navajo youth, it was the, "socially marginal Anglo students" (15) who participated alongside the Navajo youth in breaking practices. Other informants of Buddha's project described being shy, getting beaten up (or beating up others), having no friends, and discovering through breaking that they could be accepted and find new groups of friends.

These stories show how breaking has been presented as a means of solidarity and cultural aspiration to marginalised and disaffected young people.

#### The Cultural Turn: Dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In 1984, Angela McRobbie argued that dance was rapidly becoming more acceptable for men to engage with as a leisure activity because of Black (Afro-Caribbean) culture in the United Kingdom. She cited changes in technology

(from ghetto-blasters to pop videos), and dance music genres such as funk, soul and rap for facilitating the seriousness through which young men could engage with an activity previously seen as female centred. Although partner dancing dominated the first three quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social norms and even sociological accounts have addressed how men are 'forced', or pressured into dancing as a part of dating and courtship rituals, rather than through an independent desire for the pleasures involved in bodily expression to music. However, a recent account of the Northern Soul Scene that emerged in the UK in the 1960s suggests quite the opposite: that white men have had a deep and active interest in dancing since before breaking emerged as a style (Wall 2006; Wilson 2007). In *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, historian James Nott (2002) traced the passion that young men have for dance as far back as the 1930s. He wrote:

Indeed all the evidence of the numerous surveys of dancing indicates that the most prolific dancers were those aged 16-21: 'Many young men pass through a phase which has often been described by their parents and friends, and sometimes even by themselves, as "dancing mad." The only limitation to the number of dances they attend is the amount of pocket-money available.' (180)

Coming from an American perspective, Katrina Hazzard-Donald (1996) described the move in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of African Americans from rural areas to urban centres for employment after emancipation, and how the dance styles changed in the process. Here, rural dances involved group dancing, while partner dances with the single couple were a feature of urban practices. She cites the cakewalk and the lindy hop as important dances that expressed derision and cultural pride.

Hazzard-Donald suggested that the impact of better jobs for black men resulted in strengthened ties in African American families. She described how, “this trend toward a positive environment for marriage and family was clearly expressed in the urban song and dance styles emerging and dominating African American popular culture between 1920 and mid-1970s” (223). However, the social and economic changes leading to the birth of hip hop culture involved a depletion of funding for programmes in black communities involving “educational, social, and economic” support (223).

When discussing the navigation that African American females in hip hop culture needed to make between contradictory issues of sexism and racism, Tricia Rose (1994) acknowledged that, “male rappers’ sexual discourse is not consistently sexist, and female sexual discourse is not consistently feminist” (150). This observation extends to rappers’ commentary and lyrics about family life, where female rappers, “sometimes affirm patriarchal notions about family life”, and male rappers are occasionally critical of spousal and child abuse by men, and explicit in their address to other men to be responsible in raising children.

The discussion of *actual* families by hip hop pioneers has been addressed in interviews with journalists. For example, a 1993 article by Nelson George, “Hip-Hop’s Founding Fathers Speak the Truth,” showed how pioneers such as Kool Herc, Africa Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash each had a concern about the, “wholesale dissing of women” (46) in the emerging scene. Africa Bambaataa mentioned the impact of the Zulu Queens and credited his mother for his interest in music, before saying that he sees hip hop as an international culture.

Grandmaster Flash mentioned a dancer named Sister Boo, and what becomes clear in this short encounter with the *Source*, is how much the journalists are responsible for gendering hip hop culture into a male pursuit, often passing by these comments by important DJs and community leaders. It is unclear how much their comments are a response to negative press about hip hop's apparently misogynist and patriarchal values. Breaking is a male dominated practice. However, the surplus of male involvement does not necessarily conflate to misogyny, as demonstrated by the accounts above of Herc, Bambaataa and Flash.

Paul Gilroy (1997) on the other hand, began to challenge the use of the analogy of the family in black culture, especially in what he would call the product of Americocentrism. He writes:

I don't want to be forced into the position of having to point out that it may not help to collapse our intraracial differences into the image of ourselves as brothers and sisters any more than I want to be forced into the position of saying that we don't all recognize our own images in the faces of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill ...but that is some of what this Americocentric obsession with family brings to mind. (2004b, 91)

In linking, "the crisis of black masculinity" to the trope of the family, Gilroy was relieved only by song lyrics that challenge the notion of a nuclear family with suggestions of a practical and responsible, non-biological one. He saw this as a move away from the nuclear family and its stereotyped roles, including the nurturing mother. In doing so, he wanted to move beyond metaphors of the family, to new structures unrelated to familial ties and meanings.



Critiques of the nuclear family, such as that of Gilroy, have their precedents in feminist and queer thinking and activism (see Barrett 1980; Carby 1996). As Lehr (1999) pointed out, social policy in the United States serves only the interests of nuclear families, which is debilitating for poor or extended families. However effectively and unanimously the critique of the family analogy in hip hop culture has been lodged against rap lyrics, there has yet to be an examination of how the analogy of the family operates in the other 'elements', such as breaking, in a way similar to the non-biological family structure that Gilroy suggested.

When breaking, and other elements of hip hop culture are co-opted for commercial purpose, they are represented as a-historical, male dominated trends (Guevara 1996). Puerto Ricans, who also began to take up labour in urban centres in America, became neighbours to American black communities and became active contributors to the history of hip hop culture. Raquel Rivera (2003) followed along from this in her investigation of, "the huge body of hip hop creativity primarily rooted in the joint practices of Puerto Ricans, African Americans and West Indians" (x) in New York City. With regard to various ethnicities and their involvement within hip hop culture in North America, Tony Mitchell (1996) argued that:

The concern of many African-American critical commentaries on rap music to embed it in black nationalist projects causes them not only to neglect or overlook international manifestations of rap music but also to gloss over the multicultural aspects of US hip hop and more non-anglophonic rap closer to home. The participation of Puerto Rican graffiti artists and breakdancers like the Rock Steady Crew in the initial developments of hip hop in the Bronx in the late 1970s ... [is an example of this rarely acknowledged contribution] (30)

Juan Flores (2000) asserted that the omission of Puerto Ricans from hip hop history had as much to do with the music industry's selections as with social hierarchies within the local community.

Issues of spirituality also figure in this uncovering of hip hop's meaning. Rivera acknowledged a change in herself as a researcher from a sceptic of 'transcendent' talk to an attentive listener. In a conversation with Jorge "PopMaster Fabel" Pabon, he, "describes hip hop artistic expressions as 'forms' taken by the 'spirit' that has manifested itself through previous cultural expressions within African American and Latino communities" (xiii). Rivera considered her own position coming to hip hop culture and, wondering what it was that she was looking for, no longer dismissed the spiritual in an investigation that involved a question of belonging.

There is another notable shift in Rivera's approach as she begins to interchange the term 'art' with 'creative practice' with increasing frequency to describe music, dance and visual media in hip hop culture. Prior to this shift, writers such as Shusterman (1992) had described rap as a, "high art form" (Mitchell 1996, 22). Raquel Rivera's analysis describes 'cultural production', rather than attempting to situate hip hop culture within high art discourses.

Rivera noted live music on the streets, specifically street drumming, as a key influence on cultural practices of breaking. This is significant to an aesthetic appreciation of the dance that will be discussed later on in this thesis. She wrote:

The long-standing tradition of street drumming among New York Puerto Ricans and Cubans – in which African Americans also have participated – strongly influenced the music that was

recorded as soul and funk, which was later played as break-beats at hip hop jams. Furthermore, not only did b-boys and b-girls develop hip hop's kinetic language to the beat of congas and timbales on popular records, but at least one of the dance styles that greatly influenced breaking – known as rocking, uproking or Brooklyn rock, and most notably nurtured by young Puerto Ricans – has been practiced outdoors since the late 1960s to the rhythm of live conga drums. (35)

In this account, the instrumental sounds of musicians are more explicitly linked to developments in the dance, and the question of how much of this exchange is built on cross-cultural exchanges and influences in a diasporic, postcolonial local environment is addressed. Previously, Paul Gilroy (1997) was suggesting that breakdancing had been replaced in the 1980s by basketball, cars and the commercialisation of rap records. However, as demonstrated later in my research, many of the participants who initially danced in London became DJs, radio hosts and rappers, moving into other realms of creative production as they got older, and some never quit, still breaking and teaching the style in London in spots as diverse as community centres, the YMCA, Sadler's Wells and local clubs.

#### From Global Noise to Art Discourse

Subcultures represent noise (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence, which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy 'out there' but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation. (Hebdige 1979, 70)

The metaphor of noise has proliferated in early accounts of hip hop culture, from Tricia Rose's (1994) *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in*

*Contemporary America* to Tony Mitchell's (2001) edited volume: *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Dick Hebdige's (1979) earlier account, *Subculture the Meaning of Style*, set up a link between subcultural practices and noise which is often cited (Leafloor 1988; Stahl 1999) and proves convincing when related to types of music that are often experienced in amplification and at high volume. This high volume of music, interpreted by outsiders as noise, provides the key disjuncture between insiders and outsiders that Hebdige described in terms of a 'blockage' to representation. That attention to breakers' original source of amplification in the early 1980s, the ghetto blaster, received due mention in the early accounts, although theorisation remained, and still remains, quite limited in this area<sup>13</sup>. For my study, the music looped by the DJs for b-boys in New York, and the music selected by b-boys themselves and used for performances on the street, represents the beginning of a distinction that will later make its way into the dance classroom and international competitions, and onto the theatrical stage.

If subcultural theory has been challenged by various scholars in terms of its account of mediation (Thornton 1995), lack of consideration of female experience or family life (McRobbie 1984, 1997; Frith and McRobbie 1978) and usability for youth experience in the 1990s (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Huq 2006), this perspective still informs researchers' understanding of youth culture in relation to mass media (Banes 1985; Rivera 2003; Schloss 2009). Part of the difficulty for sociologists

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<sup>13</sup> My dissertation does not discuss or theorise amplification in hip hop culture. This is an area for future much needed projects.

researching now is that 'subculture' is part of the everyday vernacular of the people they interview, and the theory about subculture has informed everyday understandings about the role of the media in co-opting experiences. This particular negation can be traced back further to Adorno and Horkheimer's ([1944] 1986) reading of jazz and mass media as opposed to the achievement of high art.

Adorno's ([1936] 2002) anxieties about jazz, popular music more broadly, and the reproduction of records for mass consumption are historically situated in a turbulent international moment. His contemporary, Walter Benjamin ([1936] 2008), was also describing how the aura of art objects is lost with mechanical reproduction. This linking of the availability of art for consumption with a diminishing of the value of art is still looming in the background of contemporary studies of culture. This is especially contradictory when the studies are of hip hop culture, a group of practices organised specifically around the misuse of technology and record production. Hip hop has provided one of the most comprehensive musical responses to Adorno's anxieties about technology, reproduction of records and the subsequent diminishing of the value of art. That hip hop is now seen as one of the cutting edge forms of 'art' in many international contexts, demonstrates the value that has been ascribed to a style built on the abuse or misuse of technology (Théberge 1997).

This notion of taste, as related to knowledge and judgement, needs to be situated and embodied when considering contemporary dance practices. I acknowledge Adorno and Horkheimer's divulging of the connection between

power and knowledge, as connected in scientific investigations; yet I hope to draw out relationships between power and taste, and judgement and knowledge, which will be revealed later.

#### Hip Hop and Cultural Policy

With the development of breaking practice in different countries, cultural policy makers have often celebrated the societal benefits of dance. Some of the first writers to consider how cultural policy informed hip hop practices that included dance have been French and German writers. Hoyler and Mager (2005) described how hip hop was supported on both sides of a divided Germany. In West Germany, after World War II and into the 1960s, attempts to collapse distinctions of high/elite art and popular/low art practices were part of an educational initiative. New centres and organisations for cultural practices emerged that:

lay down the common principles of artistic-creative self-determination, cultural empowerment, the integration of social and ethnic minorities and a non-commercial orientation (Wagner, 2001). These basic guidelines reflect the widened notion of a 'social' culture 'for everyone' and 'by everyone' and acknowledge the contemporary discussions in cultural policy. Within these socio-cultural centres, the emerging new social movements of the 1970s, but also different youth groups and local initiatives were able to develop authentic places with which they could identify; places to meet and belong, to negotiate and exchange ideas. (240)

As the above example reveals, attempts within policy to collapse high/low distinctions in the arts quickly resolved into a new emergence of the same sort of division: styles supported by government as opposed to the commercial industry.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, GIs from America were stationed in West Germany and provided the first live experiences of a new culture for German youth, with hip hop in clubs and entertainment events, including an appearance of the Rocksteady Crew there in 1983 (Hoyler and Mager 2005).

Unlike the West Germans, who could have regular contact with American GIs, the East German youth came to hip hop through viewing the movie *Beat Street* (Latham 1984). In the German Democratic Republic, cultural policies tried to curb the interest in American popular forms by providing the venues and facilities for clubs that were controlled by the state party. The state eventually became instrumental in organising 'breakdance' events and competitions. Since the fat laces and other fashions were not available commercially, mothers would cut up old t-shirts to make laces and create other simulations of hip hop clothing (Raschick 2007). As state control began to loosen in the 1980s, the centres where hip hop culture happened became more vibrant. Like in West Germany, hip hop became a source for both educational and social work purposes in the 1990s through projects such as the *Hip Hop Mobil*<sup>14</sup>.

In France, Roberta Shapiro (2004) argued that social workers and educators were the first to support the development of hip hop dance. She wrote:

Members of this group backed breakdancers from the start and encouraged them to work within the theatrical format. Indeed,

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<sup>14</sup> See a short documentary in German on the Hip Hop Mobil here: <<http://vimeo.com/5109645>> [Accessed December 16, 2010]

their contribution to the 'artification' of hip-hop is essential, as it was they who first took the activity seriously twenty years ago, designated it as dance (and not play), gained government support, and influenced policy. (318)

These outsiders to the dance encouraged both the development of hip hop dance on stage, as a theatrical and professional art form, and the competition circuit that is typically sponsored by non-governmental agencies. As dancers pursued the theatrical stage, in the 1990s, "high art' dance institutions began to recognize hip-hop" (320). Notably, during the development of dance on stage, Shapiro remarked of the music:

Concert dance performances also tend to distance themselves from rap, DJing, and hip-hop music. Indeed, many hip-hop ballets draw heavily on other musical conventions – jazz, rock and roll, ancient music, classical, romantic or contemporary music, African or oriental music, Gregorian chants, flamenco, and other forms. (323)

I will return to the significance of this observation for my argument in Chapter Eight, which addresses the development of hip hop theatre.

What Shapiro highlighted is the 'artification' of the dance through theatrical presentations that are set in opposition to competitions, which are viewed by spectators as 'sport.' Younger generations of dancers and spectators, raised on a hip hop aesthetic, also treat the new 'underground' events as art. Kauffmann (2004) for example observed that the premise of these new battles was always a part of the aesthetic preferences of the participant dancers themselves.

On the one hand, breaking has clearly made its mark on the 'art' world, in various intersections across its past. From the early dance critic, Sally Banes, to present day theatrical critics in France, breaking has entered the 'art' discourse.



On the other hand, many of the young b-boys and b-girls around the world, in the early phases of the dance, saw themselves as competitors with crew loyalties, engaging in a practice of self-reflection and evolution. Somewhere along the line, b-boys and b-girls began to call themselves 'artists', or began to be labelled as 'artists' by sociologists who were writing about their practice, or about hip hop culture more broadly as an artistic and creative realm.

### Sociological Backgrounds

There are times in my analysis when the responses of interviewees seem so explicitly capable of being described by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical model of the field of cultural production that the neglect to mention his work throughout may seem troublesome. One only has to recollect that, as a cultural sociologist, I approached this study already highly influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's *Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Wittgenstein's (1967, 1980a, 1980b, 2007) approach to aesthetics and cultural values, and by Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982). These theorists have clearly provided templates for this study. In other words, the reason that particular comments by interviewees seemed to demand a Bourdieu-style analysis is because I selected, as meaningful, passages that fit with his map of the field. Rather than mapping Bourdieu onto the responses of my informants, I would like to offer now a caveat.

Both Bourdieu and Becker were heavily informed by the writing of Wittgenstein. Bourdieu made this explicit in his analysis of academic position taking (Bourdieu 1999), and Becker made this influence known through his

explanation of the inspirational role that Wittgenstein's aphorisms play in his thinking (Becker 1998). My borrowing of these authors, however, needs to be looked at from the other way around.

Bourdieu (1993) used analogies to the 'field' of sport, to demonstrate how actors make choices in 'the game' but do not create the rules of the game. He suggested that sport is analogous to the way actors take up positions in any given field of cultural production, making rational choices and actions; yet they are also forced to adhere to particular rules. From Wittgenstein he borrowed the notion of the 'rules of the game', as a way of understanding the meaning and language to which participants adhere. These analogies to sport, used also in Wittgenstein's (1967) model of family resemblances (how the word 'game' can cover various enterprises), are crucial to the reversal I would like to make explicit here.

It is of no wonder, when sociologists borrowed analogies from sports, that my analysis of an art form which is sport-like, in its centring of aesthetic practices on competition, bears a resemblance to these theoretical models. This is a mediation of a mediation cultivated through language games. Active participants in breaking have also made their lives and interactions with each other reflect the competitive aesthetic that guides their dance practice. In other words, they play for international domination in the same way that they battle each other for symbolic domination through dance. Thus, the resemblances of my descriptions to theoretical models built on an analogy to sport are by no means coincidental.

Bourdieu would argue that there are factors that the players do not want to admit they do not have control over, and that the job of the sociologist is to reveal these factors. However, this is not the aim of this particular dissertation. Instead, what I am interested in here, like Hennion (2007), is *not* to claim to reveal to actors how their tastes are a product of their class and education, but rather to address how the daily performance of their tastes is a result of particular situations, gestures, bodies, and groupings. In other words, taste is an activity that is cultivated through participation and reflection.

This chapter has addressed some of the historical perspectives on breaking and analyses of the meaning of art and identity that have emerged in the various accounts of hip hop culture. In this dissertation, I will draw attention to some new avenues for consideration, including musical taste, crews, aspirations to an international aesthetic, the significance of master classes, video mediation and the judgement and promotion of international breaking competitions. These areas fill out aspects of breaking culture that have so far slipped from the purview of analysis.

### Chapter 3: Recording Tastes (Methods)

In this chapter, I discuss both the methodology and the mixed methods used for this project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my methodological preference is for sociological and anthropological approaches<sup>1</sup> because, as trends in academic thought shift, in multiple turns, expansions and interests, these provide a basis for the most concrete glimpses of what people actually do. Having said that, those sociological and anthropological accounts that have a historical incentive, in other words that address what has come before a phenomenon, are generally more convincing (Banes 1985, Kopytko 1986, Rivera 2003 and Ogaz 2006). This is the rationale behind the mixed-method approach of this thesis, that attempts to provide an analysis that is “robust” and compelling (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick 2006).

#### My Background

Before I explain my methodology in more detail, some autobiographical details are required to situate what may be conceived of as an ‘insider’ status. I spent the large majority of my teen-age years playing music in many different contexts. I played the cello in community orchestras, the French horn in high

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<sup>1</sup> In the study of popular music, many of the most valuable accounts have come from anthropologists (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Fonarow 2006), alongside practicing participants or ‘insiders’ (Becker 1951; Hodkinson 2002; Jones 2004; Wilson 2007). Anthropologists often addressed dance as situated in culture, long before considerations of dance emerged in other fields (Hanna 1979). Alongside these accounts, ethnomusicologists have kept dance central to considerations of musical meanings in their disciplinary accounts (see Nettl 2010).

school bands and wind ensembles, the trumpet in jazz and ska bands, the bass and electric guitar in trip hop and punk rock bands and I sang in vocal jazz ensembles, at night clubs with my bands and in musicals. This quite active musical life provided me with much fulfillment. When I moved to a new city for University, my musical life came to a halt (besides some four track recordings of acoustic guitar and vocals that I did for fun at home). At the University where I did my undergraduate degree, there was not an option to continue with my musical education, unless I specialised in music. At that time, I began to frequent a funk music night called 'Mo Gravy' at a bar called, Call The Office in London, Ontario, Canada. There, I quickly came across the local b-boy scene (all male at that time) and because I loved dancing to the funk music so much, I wanted to start learning breaking moves.

In the beginning, I found it difficult to locate people to help me learn the dance. There were no formal lessons taught in the city and very few crews at that time. There were a couple of crews that I was aware of made up of close groups of male friends (one crew still in high school and another 'of age' that would frequent the club). I spent a lot of my early time trying to learn myself, through pointers I would receive occasionally from dancers on a trip to Toronto or Montreal, or through watching videos. Later, after I had some experience, I was able to get more support from the local dancers, starting with one of the b-boys in a high school and then, after showing much dedication to the practice, being asked by local b-boys in the older crew (Albino Zebrabs) to teach a class with them, which I did until I left the city. I also started the first all b-girl crew (Vasudeva) in the city around this time, recruiting potential dancers from the

local high school and training them as the leader of the crew.

Now, over ten years later, I have started and been affiliated with many different breaking crews and have presented various types of performances in different settings, from charity fashion shows to performing at a gig alongside Michie Mee and Nelly Furtado. I have a 'nasty toprock' and I was never too bothered to get power moves. Instead, I trained up a crew of all b-girls in London and encouraged them to learn power moves if they wanted them. I saw myself as a 'style' dancer, which was a dichotomy and distinction that was very much rooted in the scene politics at that time.

I have had a few years of being severely injured or recovering from long-term injuries which stunted my development with the dance. However, during that time, I continued my academic studies and developed my understanding of the history of the dance. Although I now considered myself to be 'retired,' I still train and dance whenever I have time and the mood is right. This has involved training for three hours once a week, with Kevin "DJ Renegade" Gopie coaching me in London, England. Ken Swift recently told me that I am a 'b-girl,' which means quite a lot to me coming from one of the most significant dancers on the scene today. Rawbzilla, an incredible innovative b-boy, once said that I have one of the best toprocks he had ever seen, which meant a lot to me at the time and has stuck with me as a real credit. So if I am a b-girl (an 'insider' to this dance style) then this status is due to the dancers who taught me what it means to 'dance to the drummer's beat' in the often short, but seriously influential, discussions that we have had over the last ten years that I have lived through this dance.

## Methods

My primary method for this investigation was an in-depth ethnography<sup>2</sup> of two different cities: Edinburgh (Scotland), and Berlin (Germany). I lived in Edinburgh for two years (2007-2009), spending approximately eight months of the first year conducting interviews and observing and participating in practices, before transitioning into an 'off duty' researcher and an active dancer in the second year. When my initial one year research period ended, I stayed on in Edinburgh whilst conducting other aspects of the project involving language courses and translations of key interview manuscripts, research trips overseas, e-mail correspondence and website analysis. During this time, I continued to train and practise with local b-girls, b-boys and DJs, although this period involved friendship rather than the more intense experiences I had had as an active researcher, involving formal interviews, note-taking, extended observation and reflection.

In the summer of 2007, I added a 'multi-sited' ethnographic portion to the project, involving shorter stays in Los Angeles (USA), Montreal (Canada) and Toronto (Canada), which had been intended from the beginning of this project

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the most often cited accounts of the ethnographic method address the problems it poses (Clifford 1988; Geertz 1973). Written by influential anthropologists, willing to self-critique their own practice, these reflexive analyses nevertheless do little to prepare one either for the joys and pleasures of this practice, or for the 'starting out' phases. My general understanding of the situation of these self-reflexive engagements, intended to theorise the methodological practice, is that they arose from the moments of introspection *between* ethnographic fieldwork trips. Also, much of the ethnographic method involved 'tacit' knowledge that anthropologists were expected to know through their experiences of involvement in the act of doing fieldwork. Thus, they were not concerned to give a 'how-to' account of method, nor to acknowledge or celebrate the pleasures and advantages of anthropology. There were exceptions to this, writers such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) provided 'how to' approaches for ethnographic practice.

as I had received funding from the University of Edinburgh to conduct research abroad. Having previously conducted interviews with b-boys and b-girls from Toronto and Los Angeles for my MA project, I continued to build on this previous work with the addition of a third site, Montreal. I selected these cities to follow up leads from interviews concerning the core values and insights that were exchanged between participants in these various places. Multi-sited ethnographies aim to:

examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space....This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity...[and] arises in response to empirical changes in the world and therefore to transformed locations of cultural production (Marcus 1995, 95-96).

Multi-sited ethnographies have also been critiqued for not providing the 'thick description' that anthropology as a discipline both demands and celebrates as the advantage of its methodological approach (Falzon 2009). For my research project, which was built on in-depth ethnographies situated in particular locales (Edinburgh, and Berlin), the multi-sited ethnographic portion of my study allowed me to address one of the principal aims of the research: to explore the variety of contexts within which breaking practices emerge.

In these various locales, Los Angeles, Toronto and Montreal, rather than following the collective 'scene'<sup>3</sup> within the 'locale,' I chose to follow one or two

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<sup>3</sup> On examining the use and meaning of the term 'scene' in various disciplines, Will Straw, who earlier theorised the term scene geographically, suggests that scene suggests "more than the busy fluidity of urban sociability. It compels us to examine the role of affinities and interconnections which, as they unfold through time, mark and regularize the spatial itineraries of people, things and ideas" (2002, 12). The slippery definition of the term has served it well in accounts of popular music, and the same would hold for accounts of popular dance practices.



specific, and internationally recognised, b-boys or b-girls throughout their daily lives, on a more focused, one-to-one basis involving in-depth and ongoing interviews and observations. Participants from L.A. and Toronto with whom I had been in contact for my previous project were contacted through e-mail or online social networking sites (MySpace or Facebook) and asked to participate in this portion of the study. In addition, I added Montreal as a site because I wanted to follow b-girls as part of the project and Montreal has a larger group of b-girls to choose from than other cities.

During the multi-sited ethnographic portion of this trip, I conducted interviews, both formal and less formal, with those who interacted with the b-boy or b-girl who was the centre of the study. These included dancers for the company of Jacob “Kujo” Lyons, as well as the crew members and partner of Karl “Dyze” Alba. Both of these key figures were selected because they were referenced by local dancers in Edinburgh during my ethnographic study there.

The following summer, I spent four months in Berlin, Germany. I count this as part of my multi-sited ethnographic portion of the study because I was, and still am, working on my acquisition of the German language, so the results were limited even though the time duration was of a reasonable length of engagement. During this time, I was caught in translation, with local b-boys and b-girls willingly conversing with me in English. This obviously had limitations for what can be provided here concerning the local context and, like the multi-sited ethnographic approach, it provides a limited purview of the thick description required in ethnography. However, I was an active participant there and was asked straight away on my arrival if I would compete in an

international competition with the local b-girl crew. They generously played the role of ambassadors for the local scene and explained various social contexts as they arose in our time together. The links between this scene and Scotland became apparent quite quickly, and ended with further links.

Having encountered quite a detailed array of ethnographic experiences with these multi-sited projects, I hoped to provide an overview of some international breaking cultural practices that appeared through these particular, and situated locales. In doing so, my aim was to follow the trajectory of breaking through its various phases and contexts without claiming to provide the 'whole' or a 'holistic' picture. Rather, this versioning of a multi-sited ethnographic approach aims at what Donna Haraway (1988) would refer to as 'situated knowledges'; a fragmentary account provided by my particular, embodied practices, relationships with dancers and personal trajectory of enquiry. The ethnographic account, rather than claiming to provide, say, a detailed, thick description of Edinburgh, Scotland as a 'scene,' attempts to follow and trace the competing musical tastes and contexts found in breaking culture. In this way, I diverge from traditional anthropological or ethnographic accounts, in that I am following 'conflict' or 'competing' tastes, by not necessarily following one group of people across various locales, but rather chasing up contradictory perspectives on the use of music in breaking, and the musical meaning that dancers construct through their practice and reflections.

This is rather conceptual in nature, and was one of the secondary aims of this project. In other words, the multi-sited ethnographic portion of this study was used, not to paint a picture of particular locales and their historical

contexts, but rather to gather sources for future analysis (including the collection of books, magazines and manuscripts from what I refer to later as ‘alternative archives’). This by no means suggests that I could not have studied a singular locale to discover answers to my research questions. In fact, I could have just as well provided a thick description of one locale, and would encourage future ethnographers to provide such, no doubt, interesting and useful accounts<sup>4</sup>. This project aspired to follow a research question that *emerged* from the ethnography; to explore contested and competitive musical tastes and dance perspectives, without divulging or addressing specifically the politics of a present day local scene.

One informant from a local scene explained to me that he shared information in our interview that he would not have shared with a local dancer or researcher. His explanation was that he did not want his viewpoints to be funneled into the local politics and gossip that fuel local, rival crews. In this way, I found the multi-sited ethnographic approach advantageous to my role as a researcher in a scene where the positions of local participants are constantly being negotiated, talked about and contested. I also found this method useful in providing some anonymity to particular viewpoints where necessary, especially those that most honestly challenged the local preferences or celebratory narratives.

My intention with this project was to explore the international events, structures, institutions, tendencies and qualities within breaking culture

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<sup>4</sup> In Appendix E I provide a thick description of the local b-boy Edinburgh scene as a contribution to this sort of ethnographic tradition and the insights gained from focusing on a particular locale and its context.

*without* making claims for a complete or holistic, cross-cultural or universalising methodological approach<sup>5</sup>. I decided to conduct a multi-sited, reflexive ethnography with ambitions to explore as many as possible of the different forums, avenues and locations in which breaking takes place. In doing so, I wanted to understand what the, 'global breaking world' consisted of.

I have thought critically about the terminology, "global," which Paul Gilroy (2004a) has recently critiqued as being tied up with colonising tendencies. Although he has offered up the term, "planetary" as a viable option, I have decided to call this quest, 'international' because the discourse on breaking practices has yet to link, comment on or connect to issues such as critical post-humanism<sup>6</sup>, the fate of the environment or other animals on the planet. However, as will be demonstrated later, I explore how the international experience is constructed, both historically and ethnographically, and what difficulties arise from views tied to an international perspective. I see 'international' as being distinct from 'global,' as this term reflects the circumstance that social groups from various places come together to negotiate and compete over aesthetics. In this way, consensus is often found and new social groupings are formed at events with dancers from various parts of the world congregating in one place for a short period of time.

To challenge my own past experiences as a dancer, and researcher of the North American scene (both my undergraduate and M.A. theses were devoted to

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<sup>5</sup> Similar to anthropologists, ethnomusicologists have also reflected heavily upon methodological conundrums involved in cross-cultural analysis and universal or holistic inclinations in theorisations (Nettl 2010).

<sup>6</sup> cf. Wolfe, Cary. 2010. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

the study of North American breaking culture and scenes), in this project I studied what I perceived to be the most commercial, inauthentic or misrepresented areas of the dance. In doing so, I wanted to push my own value judgements around, to make room for a multitude of viewpoints about the dance, from the perspectives of both dancers and spectators; experts and novices. In other words, although I studied events I normally would not have considered attending, or practised with dancers with whom normally I would have nothing in common (including musical tastes), I did not approach the actual fieldwork from a position of performing personal tastes and distinctions. Instead, I tried to change to fit to the new environments, and this included the way I dressed (presentation of self), how I danced (learning new styles) and how I related to such practices.

My research questions also involved matters of musical taste, as mentioned earlier. I did not want to raise this matter explicitly, as I conducted my research investigations, because I did not want people to *perform* their musical tastes for me intentionally, either in interviews or at practices. I wanted to hear about music from dancers as (and if) the topic came up in our conversations and interviews, and through other mediations, rather than leading dancers to my research questions by asking about taste specifically.

When I began the project in Edinburgh<sup>7</sup>, I also used this time to become better acquainted with the UK b-boy/b-girl scene. I attended various activities across the UK, from breaking events to theatrical performances; from practices

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix A, “Ethnographic field notes: Edinburgh, Scotland 2007” for a more detailed account of some of my first encounters dancing publicly in Edinburgh.

and rehearsals of dancers, to club nights and dance classes. I did so often alongside b-boys and b-girls from Edinburgh who would travel to various events. Again, this involved observations and conversations with dancers in London, Glasgow, Leeds and Newcastle.

I also began to interview individual b-boys and b-girls formally, and for this I tended to begin with people my age or older, looking to get a broad understanding of the history of local scenes and their trajectories. I also made a point, from the beginning, of interviewing event organisers. This was crucial for some specific aspects of my project, since event organisers select judges and DJs for breaking events. One of the early interviews I did in 2007 was with a local event organiser. He was responsible for selecting teachers and organising the major b-boy master class workshops. I discuss his commentary about his roles later on.

As I was mapping out influential b-boys/b-girls, referenced by the Scottish dancers, I decided to follow an unusual lead. One of the b-boys from Poland, who had been living in Glasgow, explained to me that a particular b-boy from New York City is a “real b-boy”, but that a particular dancer from L.A. is not a “real b-boy.” Normally such a comment might get brushed aside as a claim to authenticity, and there is quite a significant body of literature in the field of popular music studies about authenticity as a value judgement (see Frith 1983; Thornton 1995). This is one area where lines of demarcation are marked through terms such as, ‘authentic’ or ‘real.’ However, I wanted to unpack the comment further. This made me ask a different question: *what does it mean to be an ‘outsider’ to an ‘outsider’ culture?* This led me to the research area that

defined all future investigation: How are competing tastes in breaking scenes navigated, negotiated and understood? My preference was to draw attention to musical tastes and their contested musical meaning in relation to dance practice.

While in L.A., I followed leads in this area. Los Angeles is the heart of ‘the industry’ for many types of entertainers, including b-boys and b-girls who perform in music videos, in commercials, on tours with popular music artists and in movies. Those dancers from L.A. that may participate in such professional careers are often identified as inauthentic or ‘commercial’ dancers. I was able to locate the issues of the local breaking scene there and relate this back to the value judgements of the Polish b-boy.

While I was in L.A., I did what would become a trademark of my visits to various cities. I attended breaking events, finding the older generations of b-boys there and trying to get interviews with them, to ask about the history of the local scene. I also attended dance practices and classes/workshops, where possible, and made notes. I talked to those around the main b-boy or b-girl I was shadowing, to get a sense of how his/her personal stories linked. Finally, I would keep my ear on the music and look for discrepancies or disjunctures between what people *described* as their musical choices for dancing, and what they actually listened to while dancing and how this was different from either their claimed, or real preferences for other music (i.e. where individual tastes made compromises to collective tastes, and how those collective tastes were agreed upon).

Following a month-long trip to L.A., hosted by Kujo and his co-

choreographer on a new theatrical performance, alongside his dancers including a Canadian b-girl living in L.A., I headed to Canada to research in Toronto and Montreal. There I followed various b-boys and b-girls including Karl “Dyzee” Alba who offered to let me ‘shadow’ him and stay at the apartment he shared with his girlfriend (now wife). In formal, recorded interviews I did with dancers, I would begin by letting them know that I was taping the interview for the purpose of quoting them in the text of this thesis. I also explained that I would not name the person for any remarks that I felt might be read wrongly, in either the b-boy/b-girl scene or for larger audiences. I would explain that: if you are, say, an international judge of b-boy events, and you tell me that you hate judging events, then I would never quote you as saying that, because that is your ‘bread and butter.’ However, if Kujo says in an interview that he first saw Bag of Trix, a b-boy crew from Toronto, on a ‘copy of a copy of a copy’ of a video then I might name him, because he ‘was there’ and because this was his memory of that cultural moment.

Memories are not always accountable. Therefore, I used newspaper articles, video tapes, YouTube sources, interviews with other participants, and field notes to verify accounts. I have also kept journals of many events and trips since the late 1990s, so occasionally this could be accessed as an additional resource.

Throughout this practice, I was conducting a multi-sited ethnography.



This approach draws upon a notion of *trans-local scenes*,<sup>8</sup> where people traveled quite frequently for events and battles. For example, b-boys and b-girls from Scotland also visited L.A., among many other places, while I was researching in Scotland. When I shadowed Dyzee, we ended up taking a road trip to Montreal for an event and staying at the home of a b-girl whom I had interviewed while in Montreal. Things lined up often in this regard.

When I returned from the North American fieldwork, I prepared for an extended stay of three months in Berlin and a subsequent month-long visit to France for a hip hop festival<sup>9</sup>, to round out the multi-sited ethnographic research. I worked on my language skills in the lead up to this, as well as attending large-scale hip hop festivals in the UK including Breakin' Convention in London. All the while, I was continuing to practice with dancers. I was also asked to perform with the local Glaswegian crew, Flyin' Jalapenos, on the Breakin' Convention stage at the Edinburgh Festival Theatre. I was asked to participate as a favour to the choreographer, as they were putting their show

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<sup>8</sup> For Peterson and Bennett (2004), trans-local scenes are clusters of people who centre around musical practices who communicate with other similar-minded people in far away places. As Stokes (1994) had earlier pointed out:

Musicians often live in conspicuously translocal cultural worlds. They travel, their social skills are those of people capable of addressing varied and heterogeneous groups, and their value in a locality is often perceived to be precisely their ability to transcend the cultural boundaries of that locality (98).

The same is true of travelling and touring dancers of any style but especially those with ties to the entertainment business.

<sup>9</sup> I chose *Hip Opession* in Nantes, France for several reasons that also reflect the translocal tendencies of top performers and fellow academic researchers. Many of the central DJs, b-boys and b-girls that I interviewed happened to be competing or playing at this event. Also, a French sociologist, Isabelle Kauffmann, who provided me with interview transcripts from her extensive research about hip hop dances in France, as well as a place to stay around the corner from the event, had previously invited me and encouraged me to see this festival. See Appendix C for my field notes on the day of the international competition.

together; to help out. Being helpful in research continually situated me in performance settings for which I would not normally have signed on. My only regret, for my informants, was that my energies were focused more on getting interviews with dancers and observing rehearsals than on contributing to the creative process.

Throughout this thesis, I will footnote locations, dates and specificities concerning a particular quotation or observation wherever possible. Many important points were raised by dancers during moments when I did not have a tape recorder, or when I would find it inappropriate to whip out a notepad and start taking notes. In these cases, I rely on my fieldwork observations written up in the evenings, or on notes I made discreetly as soon as possible after the influential comment.

I use quotations by dancers wherever possible to substantiate my arguments, although I was quick to discover that most of the time, when I told a b-boy or b-girl I would be interested to interview him/her at a future, more convenient, moment (say, if we were at an event or club night), he or she would follow this by making, immediately, the most intriguing comments about the dance. These proved impossible to replicate in a later interview. I relied on my note taking after the fact to retain accuracy, and all of these conversations informed my analysis and the description of the scene that follows.

All together, I spoke with over one hundred dancers in extended conversations, forty-five in formal interviews, and I followed, shadowed or did more than a few follow-up interviews/conversations with six significant figures. I used note taking for the interviews, on the whole, although occasionally with

the b-boys and b-girls that I was following for a week or more, I would audio tape the interview. I asked for many more interviews than I got with this project. However, when b-boys and b-girls said yes reluctantly, but avoided me, or did not respond, I did not pursue them. This was easy because the themes of this work are so broad and cover different areas and countries.

I also uncovered a significant number of online sources (referenced later as they become relevant) and used electronic mail to conduct online interviews (either through e-mail or using interviews that were already posted on b-boy sites or on YouTube). These sources enabled me to have an almost instantaneous response to my final questions, either for piecing together aspects of the history of the dance, such as the emergence of hip hop theatre (discussed in Chapter eight) or to review important examples of how musical tastes are discussed *by* dancers *for* other dancers on an everyday basis, using new media to do so.

I moved to London, England in August 2009. While there, I have met many of the significant DJs, event organisers, b-boys, b-girls and promoters who participate in hip hop culture's variety of outlets. More than one participant commented during my first month in London that I seemed to, "know everyone already!" This I took to be a credit not only to the 'tacit' ethnographic skills I had developed in Scotland and overseas, but also to the generosity of DJs, b-boys and b-girls in the local scene who invited me along to events. Also, through my training at a local practice in London, I have been able to trace some of the most common and distinguishing UK styles and sensibilities back to some of their original sources: 'old school' teachers still coaching and influencing the

development of younger dancers. For example, Kevin “DJ Renegade” Gopie is an internationally recognized DJ for dance events and competitions, who also trains up many of the local dancers in London. He explained to me that he was really influenced by Fred Astaire’s moves, and some of this footwork and stance are visible in the style of toprock done in London at the present time.

I have often done ‘follow-up’ correspondences, through e-mail, with b-boys and b-girls I interviewed earlier to stay connected. I have also kept afloat with developments in the scene through Facebook. Although I did not use Facebook as a central part of my methodology, I imagine that researchers in the future, conducting ethnographies, should consider the impact this resource has on their practice.

I use quotations from b-boys and b-girls from interviews that I found online. I generally did this with dancers that I had also spoken to or interviewed<sup>10</sup>. I prefer to use quotations from public interviews, having the backdrop and context from my own participant observation and interviews with the b-boys and b-girls. This is a strategy that captures effectively how the b-boys or b-girls might put their opinions when addressing other b-boys or b-girls.

Sometimes well-known b-boys and b-girls would treat me as a journalist. Often times, they would have a learning curve for what an academic interview entails: different questions than a journalist would ask and, with my interviews, a tendency for more depth. During my interviews with Jonzi D, Ken Swift and others on the Breakin’ Convention tour, participants would often ask me what I

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<sup>10</sup> This is not the case for, Remind and Crumbs from Style Elements crew.

was looking to “get.” After probing further, I found that dancers experienced journalists as often being after a particular story. Journalists have also decided their angle before the actual interview. I would tend to respond that I do not know what I am looking for, and they would quickly see that my style was not similar to that of a journalist and respond accordingly.

### Amateur Research

While conducting my research, as a PhD student, I had an affinity with enthusiast researchers, outside of formal education, that I would meet along the way. In Glasgow, a DJ/B-girl shared her own personal archive with me that included video footage, flyers, records, shoes and other collectables. She, like many others I came across, was deeply invested in thinking about hip hop culture. For her, this was a lifestyle but also a self-education. She shared footage with me, that other b-boys and b-girls had never seen before, of Storm’s<sup>11</sup> visit to Scotland years ago, for example. Similarly, many of the hip hop participants I met along the way guided me to important source materials, alongside their invaluable insights, and these materials became central to my analysis.

Two recent accounts of enthusiasts including Finnegan’s (2007) article, “Should we notice researchers outside the university?” and Elkins’ (2003) book about art criticism, describe the instrumental role that ‘amateur’ or non-affiliated researchers play in contributions to knowledge. Enthusiast researchers who collect, archive and analyse experiences and art for the love of

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this dissertation I refer to b-boys and b-girls by their b-boy/b-girl name. These nicknames are the way they are referred to in the culture, but occasionally I have used full names, with their b-boy or b-girl name in quotation marks.

it, outside their professional jobs, have sustained art criticism, among other areas of interest in the sciences, social sciences and humanities.

I relied on the generosity and kindness of participants who shared source materials with me. In fact, this was a part of my ethnographic practice and one of the final points I would like to make about my methodological approach. My ethnographic method, as illustrated in what follows, is not used to provide a 'thick description' of a locale or of people. Likewise, this is not intended as a lateral, holistic study of the entire international scene, or the entire scene as represented through the few cities where I researched. I used the ethnographic method to locate alternative archives and sources, and to better understand the information I would find out about the scene in books, magazines, videos and online. My interviews with dancers, although vital, do not provide the whole picture and were followed up with historical enquiries using multimedia sources, translations and embodied insights. This project, following the claims of experimental filmmaker and anthropologist, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1992), aims to, "speak nearby" to hip hop culture rather than to speak *for* the participants in this dance practice.

In this way, I am not an 'insider' to any scene or practice represented here, even though I am a participant and dance practitioner. Rather, I am an 'outsider' to this outsider culture, but one that has a few things to say nearby. I say this even as some of the most influential b-boys, b-girls and DJs occasionally feel the need to remind me, often with an amused grin, "Mary, you *are* a b-girl." This ambiguity around identity, both group and individual identification, is an area which is important to mention here, although there is not space in this

particular work to address these distinctions in more depth.

In this chapter, I have laid out some of the methodological approaches I have explored and the issues surrounding their use. As will become apparent in the accounts that follow, I place an emphasis on using texts and voices as the starting point for analysis. Sometimes this involves a quotation from an interview, and at other times involves an interpretation of a promotional write-up on a website for an international event, situated by the ethnography I have conducted. Rather than using interviews to assert facts about the history of, say, hip hop theatre, I have left the quotations intact, as ‘voices’ in the story. This is to draw attention to aspects of the unverifiable in the memories of those that were “there” at times. Finally, I have tried to situate my own position, within all of this, as a position that fluctuated in terms of identity and which remained outside of the cultural practices to which I was also perceived, on occasion, to be an insider. This is a complicated perspective, but one that resembles the many interpretations of my position that were part of my every day interactions with b-boys and b-girls.

What I have provided in this chapter is an insight into the methods and development of this research project. In doing so, I have situated my own biographical information and reflected on the nuances around my position as an insider to the dance practice, and an outsider to the various dance scenes with which I engaged as part of my ethnography. Although these identifications are not clear or easy, what is evident is that there are issues of power that are always raised in conducting ethnographic research. Even as there are multiple power relations that exist between the researcher and the different

participants, these are reflected in the research in various ways. One of the issues in conducting interviews was to 'give back' something to dancers that had provided me with a lot of their time and effort. One way of doing this was to get them work, wherever possible and, in doing so, to not make money myself or take jobs teaching or performing if I could provide someone else with the experience and endorsement. I also made it a priority, wherever possible in this account, to foreground other people's perspectives on the dance, rather than my own,. However, my own judgements and structuring of the argument clearly demonstrate the ethical issues at the heart of an ethnographic enquiry.





## **Section II: Collective Standards**



## Chapter 4: Musical Taste and Competence

Collective standards, whether these are represented in musical tastes or dance practices, are agreed upon and asserted. Taste has been discussed, by Hume (1965 [1757]) and Bourdieu (1984) among others in terms of the agreed upon judgements of particular groups of people. To begin a consideration of the way taste operates in international breaking culture, this chapter explores the contexts in which musical tastes transform. I am thinking here about musical taste in terms of 'phases'; people having varying conditions and modes for their tastes. Taste is a practice that is not static, and thus it goes through a variety of phases that do not necessarily lead to any particular type of progress or evolution. Rather, the conditions and contexts for people's musical tastes, especially those of the participants of dance practice, make these not only performative but also *relational* and often competitive. Hennion (2007) suggests that "taste is not an attribute, it is not a property (of a thing or of a person), it is an activity." It is this active sense of taste which will be explored in this chapter. This will be pursued through in depth interviews and participant observation alongside a qualitative assessment and overview of various theoretical positions.

### Talking about dance

"Music is a big part of every type of dance. You have to love the music first before you can move to it. You know what I'm saying? If you learn the music first, the movement will come. Anything

that you move to... it works. Music is a big part of every dance.”  
UK B-Boy champ Mouse<sup>1</sup>

In this remark, b-boy Ereson “Mouse” Catipon describes the relationship between music and dance as he sees it, with his usual brevity. Mouse was almost unanimously cited as the top b-boy in the UK during 2007, although many of the British dancers I spoke with qualified this by saying, “He’s not actually *from* the UK though.” They did this in a self-deprecating way while sheepishly explaining that the UK breaking scene is not up to the international standard. In this way, Mouse is also part of a cross-cultural exchange through his involvement with crews in the UK, alongside his involvement in the international circuit of top competitors and performers.

Originally from the Philippines, Mouse moved to the UK in 2006. His perspective on dance practice, quoted above, provides an interesting framework for a discussion of musical tastes in relation to dance. He suggests that love for music is the instigator for dance practices and that dance competence stems from *musical* appreciation. Rather than describing the role of dance for musical competence<sup>2</sup> (Blacking 1971), the sentiment being articulated here is the reverse: the role of music for *dance* competence. Mouse suggests that musical tastes for dance practice can be broad: “anything that you move to...it works.” These statements set up the themes of this chapter, about musical taste and competence in relation to dance practices, at both the international and

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<sup>1</sup> Q&A panel Liverpool April 5, 2008. I asked each person on the panel that I was invited to chair what role music plays in their dance practice for a public forum.

<sup>2</sup> Anthropologists (Chernoff 1979) and ethnomusicologists (Blacking 1971) have remarked that dance is an aspect of musical competence and that most musicians learn about music first through dancing and grooving to music as children. In my research, I found that musical competence is another aspect of the relationship of music and dance that is worth considering, alongside musical taste.

local levels. And they set them up by organising an understanding of the relationship between music and dance around *listening* practices.

Dancers and DJs describe their tastes reflexively when reporting on their personal experiences, as their tastes are transformed through their involvement with music as dance practitioners. In each of the examples that will follow here, the embodied experience of music, through taste practices, was articulated through language, and situated in a particular time or place where that practice had both performative and social meanings.

### ‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’ in Musical Education

In breaking practices, individuals make selections about the music that will be heard. Their tastes are sometimes informed by the ‘group’ tastes and by trends in the dance. For example, b-boys and b-girls are, in most cases, invested in getting ‘props’ (accolades) from their peers. This can inform what music they respond to, how they choose to move, and what they say about the dance. It is possible for tastes to change over time, and to change again to a position resembling an initial taste. Trends constitute an unexplored area in theorisation about tastes, but an interesting avenue nevertheless.

Breaking, is a competitive dance in its most common form<sup>3</sup>. In competition, or what breakers call *battles*, the DJ selects the music rather than the dancers. That means that the dancers do not know what music is going to be played during the battle, or what precise musical phrase will accompany them

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<sup>3</sup> Rather than a theatrical one set for stage, although competitions frequently happen on stage now as does hip hop theatre, which is discussed in Chapter 8.

when it is their turn to hit the floor (part of this depends on when the previous dancer finishes). This means that breaking battles demand a high degree of musical competence. In other words, knowing music, knowing how to dance to variations in musical rhythms, and the ability to anticipate the music, are all aspects that help dancers win battles. Musical competence is a central *aesthetic* criterion for judgement in breaking competitions.

Although the musical tastes of dancers and DJs will range extensively, both individually and between each other, the music that is selected for practising and performing is often a reflection of a particular type of musical preference. This involves musical selections that are good to dance to, at a particular time and place. For example, dancing to Radiohead may seem innovative or ‘new’ for a b-boy in a promo video, compared to dancing to classic funk tracks from the 1970s, but on a theatrical stage it may be deemed clichéd or amateur. In a breaking battle, the same track would seem unusual or perhaps even lacking in ‘energy’ for the moves that have been prepared by dancers to display. DJs and dancers have both been known to get it ‘wrong’ as well, and this is the rupture that proves the rule<sup>4</sup>.

Occasionally, during a battle, b-boys or b-girls would gesture or comment to the DJs to change the music when a song was deemed too inappropriate to continue dancing to<sup>5</sup>. Both the gestures and the comments reveal that, although tastes are understood as individual passions, related to dance activities and developments, the cultural codes of breaking often demand

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix E for a detailed discussion of this.

<sup>5</sup> I speak about this disjuncture between DJs and b-boys in Edinburgh at length in an article about musical ‘wastes’ and tastes (Appendix E)

an adherence to an individual musical judgement of 'right' and 'wrong,' or 'good' and 'bad.' These judgements are absolutely dependent on the context; what is appropriate in one setting may be dismissed in another.

A b-boy from Northern England, who began dancing in the 1980s, explained that when he was a beginner he was listening to the 'wrong' music, and that he then learned to dance to the 'right' music later on. Although he never made explicit the authority on which he drew for this assessment, he did attend master class workshops held by foreign (American) dancers who explained what is right and what is wrong to dance to. In contrast, other b-boys in the UK were listening to the 'right' music because it was the music 'of the time' when they started to practice. For example, home video footage from a 1980s battle, at the house of another old school b-boy from the UK, this time from the South, contained only songs that were the popular music of that era, as the b-boy explained. Many of the songs that were playing during that battle are now considered safe musical choices for breaking events.

Since dancers most often select the music that they practice to at home or with their friends, the possibilities for musical selection are personalised. Dancers also tend to select the music at local practices, so one or two dancers pick for the group. There are a couple of exceptions to this. For example, a DJ in Los Angeles selected music for dancers at a local practice at a church. (Toronto and Texas all have practices at churches). The L.A. DJ came into the church gymnasium, set up decks on the stage, and selected music 'live' for the dancers



half way through the breaking practice<sup>6</sup>. This is an activity that he did almost every week.

Sometimes crews express a particular musical taste as a collective. This group experience of taste often means that the dynamic movements of the group are shaped to match the types of beats, sounds and flows experienced in the music of choice. However, b-boys and b-girls displayed an eclectic range of musical preferences during my research in various countries. B-boys at a jam in L.A., arrived wearing tight colourful jeans, lots of facial piercings, chains and Mohawks. One of the b-boys explained that they preferred to dance to Depêche Mode and Björk, but when he went to events he would dance to the music the DJ was playing (not those two artists). This example demonstrates how dancers' attractions to particular types of music are not predetermined or shaped completely by their participation in dance practice. While it is difficult to say why people are attracted to particular music, there is no denying that popular music continues to be instrumental in shaping identities. As Simon Frith (1987) has suggested: "The question we should be asking is not what does popular reveal about the people but how does it construct them" (133). For dancers, music can play a formative role in not only identity and representation, but also in artistic expression and practice.

A b-boy from a Canadian crew, Lance "Leftelep" Johnson, who has been breaking for over fifteen years, explained his individual tastes thus:

I mostly listen to underground LA music, especially Project Blowed. I feel that this form of rap brings something different to my dancing, and to me it's the most b-boy essence. To rap so

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<sup>6</sup> This also happens at Homeland in Long Beach.

aggressively and free, while manipulating all of the algorithms of the beat and the silence essence that exists between. My dancing strives to search for what's in between the beat; finding the spirit that gave birth to the relationship between the verse and the beat.

To me music is more inspiring than other dancers. MCs like Mikah Nine, show me how to flip beats in ways that I have not seen b-boys/ b-girls do yet. This is my inspiration to hit those beats in such intricate spontaneity.

What Lance is suggesting is that in his dance practice music “affords” (DeNora 2000) new possibilities. In his musical listening, he can imagine new movements and flows that he has yet to see in dance performances. His aim is to make the music manifest in the visual sense, through dance, and in doing so, capture not only music but also the spaces between, the silence that always accompanies music and sound<sup>7</sup>.

The DJ that is in Lance's crew tends to appreciate the same musical artists as the rest of the crew, and also enjoys dancing to them in practices. Since the artists mentioned are not the typical ones heard at events, it is to their benefit that the dancers have a DJ who shares their musical tastes, and is thus aware of them, as part of their crew.

Similarly, Mouse has a good relationship with a DJ who often played at breaking events. When asked what music he likes, he responded with his usual brevity: “I like *Mexican*, *Apache*<sup>8</sup> and all the old school breaks. And Timber's mix

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<sup>7</sup> See some video footage of Lance's dancing here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH0D\\_KkmYIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH0D_KkmYIE) [Accessed June 19th, 2011]. Notice the unconventional setting with b-boys on couches in a lounge area and unconventional attire of bare feet. His voice over explanation and dance performance with his crew and friends are here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=464pXDgQxdM> [Accessed June 19th, 2011]. The style is described as “freestyle improv” in his commentary, and on the screen titles the style is described as “freestyle experimental performance.”

<sup>8</sup> Babe Ruth (1974), Michael Viner's Incredible Bongo Band (1973).

CD!!” Timber<sup>9</sup> is the DJ for events in the UK, Ireland, and Spain where he now resides. On one of his mix CDs there are shout-outs to and from key international b-boys. The back of one of DJ Timber’s CDs reads:

35 TRACKS OF ROCK, FUNK, LATIN, RAP & MORE CUT UP RAW FOR B-BOYS & B-GIRLS WORLDWIDE BY GRAND SUPREME TIMBER MACHINE MIGHTY ZULU KINGZ BAD TASTE CRU BELFAST CITY BREAKERS HORSEPOWER DJ MILITIA
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DJ Timber is originally from Belfast. He moved to Manchester, aged 19, and has just moved to Barcelona. Timber explained that he got into dancing and DJing at the same time and took neither seriously at first. He had wanted to b-boy since he was 3 or 4 but little by little he forgot about it until later on. He feels that it is because he is a b-boy as well as a DJ that he can DJ well. This suggests that he can read dancers, and that that is why he knows how to respond to them, through his previous experiences with dance.

The late DJ Leacy, an influential DJ for international b-boy events, spoke in a similar way about the relationship between dancers and DJs in an interview with Konee Rok. The explanation is worth including in full:

Well definitely I mean, I bring the records ... You know it’s like I’m thinking like before I’m even at the jam, what’s it going to be like, basing it on that ... yo! Thinking whose gonna be there, what’s going to be thrown down. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I’m also thinking about the music I brought last year. I can’t repeat bro, it’s like for a break DJ it’s the same as a b-boy bro, you can’t ... repeat.

You can’t come to ... primers as a b-boy and do what you did

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<sup>9</sup> DJ Timber, whom Mouse is promoting through the proceeding comment, is from Ireland, and represents Bad Taste Cru – which consists mainly of dancers from Ireland, though many of the crew members currently live in Newcastle.

last year in the circle. I can't bro. I'm going to play what I played in the finals last year in the preliminaries and I'm gonna throw some new shit in the finals.

But what my minds thinking up in there I'm going to look at the dancers bro I bring what I know is going to work, but then I look at the dancers while they're dancing. And I'm thinking, ok bro, he's going to react to this, I know he's going to react to this.

I mean there are certain cats, there were European cats here this weekend and I've seen them at the jam react to certain breaks so I do try to tailor it and specialise it and drop it for them. Of course I've got to be careful because I don't want to show no favoritism. It's not like that at all I'd love to drop the right record for every ... dancer so he can bring out the best in himself but bro it's like I anticipate the dancers move bro I ain't gonna drop no ... disturbance while my man's in the middle of his toprock. I'm going to wait until he freezes and then I'm going to give him like the warning with the scratch and I'm going to bring that shit in on time. I'm going to bring in the new break.

So it's all about anticipation for me and also just like reading the crowd reading the dancer especially the dancer because I'm there for the dancer man, it's like fuck the crowd. If the dancer's feeling it then that's cool man he's going to bring out the best in him. That's what it's about for me. I mean I see myself the b-boy first and DJ second comes for me. So the b-boy comes first for me the DJ comes second. I'm just the audio he's the visual. Me playing music with no b-boys is like a b-boy dancing without music, it don't make ... sense man.<sup>10</sup>

Leacy was concerned with transnational sociability. I define transnational sociability as the tendency towards generosity, affinities, or imagined kinships shared by participants at a festival, summit, cypher or other short encounter, enabled by travel or technological communications. This is in opposition to local strife, competition and the difficulties inherent in the everyday encounters experienced in a local scene. When participants pass through a locale during travel they are often greeted with hospitality, as special guest; a different way than they would be received if they moved to a place and

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<sup>10</sup> "YouTube – DJ Leacy Tribute 1971-2004 – by Konee Rok."  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44d4UR6GW78>> [Accessed April 8, 2010]

lived there for a longer period of time. In Leacy's case, he was interested in facilitating transnational sociability between dancers and the music at such international gatherings.

DJ Leacy, was familiar with the musical tastes of dancers from different places, and he saw his job as to do with not only "bringing the records" but also catering to the distinct and individual tastes of the dancers. He did this in a way that was perceived as being fair both to those dancers with whose musical tastes he was familiar and to those whom he did not know personally. He saw his role as complementary to the dancers, however DJ and dancers have a reciprocal relationship. Leacy was also concerned with making a balance of newness and familiarity in the tracks he played. There are musical tracks with which the dancers are familiar and which they will want to listen to while they are dancing, and there is also pressure on the DJ to produce new musical materials for the culture. DJs spend much of their time digging crates for 'new' old music.

One b-boy recalled how Leacy had asked him once what kind of music he liked, and he had responded with the name of a specific track. Months later, during a battle, Leacy put on the track while his crew was battling. The dancer was really impressed that Leacy had remembered his specific preference, for that long, and had thought to play the track he loved. This same dancer, it is worth noting, often selected the music at a local practice and would repeat a particular song over and over (whichever specific song was his favourite at the time to train to). This was a rather uncommon practice, and revealing of the range of taste practices that can link to dance practices.

Another b-boy from Canada recalled watching a video of an event where Leacy was spinning, and noticing that he was really paying attention to the dancers and reacting to their dance with the music. Leacy's international popularity as a DJ<sup>11</sup>, and the subsequent musical landscape of which he was the key architect, during a specific time in the history of breaking, was due to his ability to communicate with the dancers through conversations, gestures, and musical selections.

Selections by DJs often help to create or foster the group experience of taste through their involvement at events. Taste involves not only the familiar but also the similar and the new. In the case of those DJs who play at breaking events, their musical production, which comes through their musical selections, is informed by dance practice.

### Musical Competence

Competitions (known as 'battles') are the dominant places where dancers develop and test their technique and originality. In competitions, dancers need to 'know' the music, as demonstrated through their ability to predict, play with and express music that they have not selected, in an improvised way. This form is no less aesthetic or artistic than theatrical presentations of dance, and indeed often takes place on a stage.

DJ Timber suggested that he can actually assess whether a b-boy is good or not by where they finish in the music. Good b-boys and b-girls will

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<sup>11</sup> That one of the most influential DJs was of Irish descent, and grew up in England, is telling. His brother recalls the two of them being picked on, as boys, because of their Irish heritage.

intuitively end their set or freestyle at the natural end of a musical phrase, before the sample loops round<sup>12</sup>. He learned this explicitly through conversations with an older American b-boy who had been living in Europe for some time. The b-boy explained that instrumental break beats usually have a phrasing across a certain number of bars and that b-boys who know the break beat well, or who can feel the phrase, are able to end their dance routine to coincide with the end of the break. A break beat sample will have a pulse, and a clear count of (usually) four pulses in a group (bar), with four, or multiples of four groups (bars) making up the whole sample. However the rhythms of these samples are complex, with cross- and syncopated accents. Knowing the break beat involves not just being able to count its groupings and its length, but also being able to resolve out the different phrasing accentuations that are contained within it. Although DJs will loop the sample, they will find it easier to change tracks if breakers end with the phrase. If they continue into the next loop of the sample, then the DJ cannot switch the track without interrupting the flow of the next dancer. Good dancers, Timber explained, will also wait or delay their entrance to correspond with the next beginning of a break beat.

#### Musical Competence (Musical Instruments)

Many dancers have also played instruments or participated in music making or DJing while they were growing up. They feel that their musicality and understanding of dance has benefited from this education. Before providing some examples of this, I want to qualify my use of the word musicality.

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<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence, Newcastle, 2009

Musicality is defined by Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) as the “expression of our human desire for cultural learning, our innate skill for moving, remembering and planning in sympathy with others that makes our appreciation and production of an endless variety of dramatic temporal narratives possible” (p. 4). Building on this definition, I suggest here that musicality is not only a feature of the performance of dancers, but is also a value judgement made about dancers’ expressive capacities. To put this in a historical context, Lydia Goehr (2008) explains that when musicality (“das Musikalische” in German) was first reflectively used as a noun, it became a value judgement, meant to provide approval or disapproval to both literary and painterly art works. Goehr writes:

At its broadest, “musicality” connotes some sort of pure *Innerlichkeit*, or powerful preconceptual or predeterminate expressivity, an emotional or sensuous energy or drive of deep aesthetic, moral, cultural, religious, and social significance. It bears a close relation to other developing terms of the period: “the lyrical” (*das Lyrische*) and “the aesthetic” (*das Ästhetische*). It captures the yearning toward collectivity, unification, or expressive synthesis as it surpasses both in origin and effect the divisions brought about by reason, representation, and concept. (50)

For dancers, this also involves a detailed judgement as to whether someone is dancing ‘in’, ‘on’ or ‘off’ the beat. It is important to note that hip hop dancers never describe themselves as “having musicality.” My introduction of the word is outside the vernacular associated with breaking practice. I argue that musicality is a value judgement which, when articulated, assumes a musical competence on the part of the spectator: that they know what to listen *for*. In this way, labelling musicality can often be problematic, in that listening



to music has many different cultural contexts and expressions to contend with for the meanings that it provides. Dancers may respond to the music in different ways, emphasising, synchronising with or counterpointing the inner complexities of the rhythms with different moves and steps. This tends to be in a linear relationship (in or off the beat) with the rhythm of the music in breaking. But these responses, and the responses of the spectators, depend on both dancers and spectators having a developed understanding of both musical rhythm and dance moves which is an internalised understanding of the beat. Thus, musicality is associated with universal narratives and intuitive, shared communication and shared time (Malloch and Trevarthen 2008), and is concerned not only with rhythm, but also with pitch, expression, dance, timbre, texture, structure, shape and emotion. This understanding of musicality, where expression meets aesthetic judgement and appreciation, is central to the musical competence associated with experiences of breaking practices.

Many older dancers train younger dancers in ways that they *wished* they had been during their own development<sup>13</sup>. The training and discipline that they have acquired is focused into training up the next generation and helping them to experience the same feelings of competence and success that the previous generation gained through their involvement.

One of the contexts that provided a meaning for musical competence was music education, both formal and informal. In the examples that follow, musical competence is linked with acts of disciplining the body. This link

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<sup>13</sup> This wishful thinking was expressed several times in interviews that I conducted with older b-boys.

became clear through descriptions of personal histories of dance practice. As these examples show, musical development requires not only understanding of music but technical training that allows a dancer to demonstrate his/her musical competence through his/her dance practice.

For example, London DJ/dancer and coach of the UK National b-boy champs, Soul Mavericks crew, Kevin “Renegade” Gopie recalled of his early days:

My earliest dance influences come from watching old movies like *7 Brides for 7 Brothers* and *Singing in the Rain*. I used to enjoy watching Russ Tamblyn and Gene Kelly. Powerful dancers. It instilled in me the idea of looking strong and solid when you dance. Good form balanced with good technique...I never had any mentors as a dancer. I basically had to train myself even though I trained with others, who also trained themselves.

As a martial artist I trained mainly Chinese Kung Fu styles which are very focused on form and drills ... I played the drums as a youngster which helped me understand rhythm, syncopation etc. Also being a scratch DJ reinforced these things and showed me the importance of the 'silence' or time between moves.<sup>14</sup>

Competence in dance involves an understanding of phrasing, timing and instrumentation. Renegade’s early engagement with drums, his music education, helped him to DJ well, which then also informed his dance practice and his coaching of younger dancers. Another UK b-boy/dance teacher, Ed Stephen, explained that he also did Chinese martial arts for a number of years before he started to dance, and his earliest mentors were kung fu teachers. Alongside this training, he also played the euphonium and trombone. He explained:

I did play those two instruments and I was involved in variety of

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<sup>14</sup> personal correspondence April 2, 2010.

orchestras and brass bands... I think it has informed my dancing definitely as I not only feel a very strong attachment to the music created by brass instruments but also helped me to develop an understanding of what actually creates music and to be able to pick apart its elements, especially as my instrumental experience was often restricted to playing bass lines and not the glamorous bits!!<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, American b-boy champion, Leon “Vietnam” Carswell, from Rockforce Crew, suggests that, besides having a next-door neighbour who coached him at track and field from a very young age, music also added to his dance competence:

As far as musical instruments, I played the organ a little trumpet and drums ... My grandpa was a saxophonist. Understanding music helped me with feeling and responding to the music better. I can hear all the lil’ things in the music.<sup>16</sup>

Many of these examples demonstrate the significance of both formal and informal education for the development of taste practices. Some of the more formal influences came from forms such as martial arts that take place outside of ‘artistic’ institutions or contexts. These forms of education provided the technical training helpful for dance practice and meanings, while simultaneously providing other frames of reference beyond dance. All of these practices place listening to music as central to the understanding of dance meanings and this is crucial to the chapters that follow and the argument that continues to develop. Before leaving aside this broad overview of how b-boys and b-girls talk about dance abstractly, in relation to their practice and love of music, I would like to address some of the historical shifts that older, influential dancers in the international scene have articulated.

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<sup>15</sup> personal correspondence April 3, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> personal correspondence April 3, 2010.

### Educated Tastes

Dancers of various hip hop and funk styles accounted for the development of their musical tastes first by exploring the relationship between musical tastes and dance practice, and second, by referring to the range of musical tastes that are organised around dance principles and informal education. Dancers spoke of their love of music in relation to what they interpreted as a self-directed education. Here they were not speaking about formal institutional education, but rather the guiding principles, meaning and mentorship involved in street dance practices. For example, when I asked dancers at a Q&A panel the following questions, “What role does music play in your creative practice? Or what role has it played in your dance?” one dancer answered:

Well all I can say is that when I started dancing it wasn't really about the music it was about playing with the sounds and performing tricks. That's the only thing I knew was how to do tricks and how to show off. Now the more I trained the more you appreciate the music you are dancing to, which I found with any style of dance ...

You begin to listen to music not just hear it. Oh right I didn't hear that “tst tst” ... in the background before. You know? So for me, it was really like the more I trained the more I appreciated it, the more I had a love for music and the greater my love for music was the more I wanted to learn dance because I wanted to know more about other music as well.

When I see movement on TV or when I listen to music I think, right, that's what he was talking about; you have to do it on the ‘and 1’ not just on the 1 – understand in terms of understanding the beat. Through that, it manifested in myself to be better, to improve my dancing and just to ... listen and understand it, just really take it in. Not just like put a tune on, put a tune on and just oh [say] that's a good tune. It's like “but why is it a good tune?” and for me I learned why music is art because I can move to it. I

can dance to it. I can put my body in a different position, learning from great teachers and artists such as yourselves [gestures to other panellists] who have educated me over the years, music is just the love.

The relationship that he is describing is situated within several different, common articulations of taste practice: the love of music, musical competence, musical judgement, and musical education. The idea of individual preference is not emphasised. Instead, the speaker situates his tastes within a group experience of taste that involves peer-to-peer informal education. Another of the panellists agreed with the first panellist's emphasis and continued to describe how his dance practice is inspired by, informed by and motivated by his individual musical understanding:

When I first learned popping – electro ... I didn't have the vocabulary. I felt like someone who was mute. I'm hearing the beat. I have in my head all these things I want to do. I felt restricted so I went and learned popping. I was listening to James Brown and I couldn't do anything else, so I then learned locking and funk styles so I can express myself to that music.

Both of these dancers come from a background of various dance styles. Their learning is expansive and covers different genres of music and different dance practices in a very eclectic mix. In the quotation above, the panellist points out that when he heard music belonging to a new style of dance that he was learning, he, "felt like someone who was mute." The limitations in his vocabulary of moves are experienced as a restriction to a form of expression, and this expression is clearly associated with the musical form. Even though both of these dancers have moved into choreography and theatrical performance, their foundation in the styles was clearly informed and motivated by their relationship to music. Their familiarity with movements enhanced their

experiences of music. Imagination is a significant part of this experience: listening to music and creating movement in one's head. Then the dancers have to learn the technique to execute their ideas. This involves a taste for particular movements and ideas of movement that are informed by musical structures, sounds and conventions.

One of the panellists above described how he did not play a musical instrument but came from a family that was musical. Thus he was able to ask family members about sounds he heard in music in order to develop his musical competence. He would ask which instrument made each sound he heard. Now, when he hears music, he is able to, "listen to everything" and hears, "so much!"

B-boys and b-girls have specific ways of discussing their musical passions that have been informed by a shared and shifting discourse since the international expansions of this dance style. Many b-boys and b-girls described their original tastes, and how these preferences for particular music changed as they continued with their breaking practice. For example, a thirty-year-old b-boy from the UK described:

The first music that I started breaking to was New Jack, which isn't necessarily the best type of music to break to but its pretty good for getting chicks. When I started getting into breakin' and the guys who were trying to teach me how to break they were all into electro which didn't really have a lot for me 'cause I ... hate electro.

I think music relates to dance and your dance should be an embodiment of that music at that time. From playing bass with your feet, snare drums with you hands and high hats and crashes with your heads, in terms to of breaking down percussion. But also playing horn sections, singing the words finding ways to actually act the words. It's all ways of making things a bit different, as is high and low you know you do different levels, and differences between strong and soft.

What he is describing is twofold. First, his individual preferences for particular dancing music are distinct from those of the people that were teaching him breaking moves. Here his individual musical taste varies from the group experience of taste, as shared by informal teachers (an older generation of b-boys). Second, he situates dance as an embodied performance of music. Within that experience, he goes on to describe dynamic qualities of movement that add something new to the music, including different levels of movement and qualities of softness and strength.

#### Historical Shifts in Musical Tastes

It became clear throughout many of the interviews that people could dance to the 'wrong' music. This was clear once, in the example of the UK b-boy mentioned earlier in relation to his own musical tastes, and often in conversations with American b-boys about the European musical contexts. This was also made apparent through visual clues, such as when b-boys made fun of particular songs that came on, or danced jokingly because they could not imagine dancing seriously to that type of music.

Those who have musical tastes different from those of the group are both aware of their distinctions, and in a position where they must navigate their tastes through the collective dance practice. On the one hand, dancers link their own dance practice to musical taste. On the other hand, dancers are expected to adhere to a particular musical sensibility to demonstrate their proper education and adequate 'deepening' of taste through dance practice. This is as true for 'street dance' styles as for any other form of dance. However,

a DJ's relation to dancers suggests a consideration of personal musical preferences that is not as dogmatic as the judgements of dancers about themselves and about each other. Rather, the spectators and judges may make judgements of *musicality*, based on the dancers' negotiations of a particular part of a song at the moment of performance. These assume a competence at associating visual accents and cues with listening skills. For both dancers and DJs, then, I argue that musical tastes *get performed*.

One of the ways to make sense of variations in musical tastes, and their relationship to dance practices, is to look at developments historically. B-boys often dance to the music that is popular during the time of their late teenage years or early 20s. This explains how many dancers begin with certain musical tastes, which are then transformed as they become interested in breaking.

Niels "Storm" Robitzky, an internationally recognised b-boy from Germany who began dancing in the 1980s, situates an understanding of taste practices both historically and culturally when he explains the following:

In the music there is the key. The music is the key to everything. I think that whatever music you play in our dance forms we interpret the music. And the music also tells us where the dance form is actually coming from you and what approach is right to this dance. Now, you probably notice and it's a good example, it's like in Germany there was a time like between the late '80s and early '90s, '89 until '93-'94 we preferred to dance to some hip hop genre that we called Britcore. It was like some fast, some fast break beat, those British hip hoppers, mainly from London, that they used to produce their rap music.

You know like a perfect example would be Hijack or Gunshot ... Those rap crews that probably nobody knows in the US right now. But they were using like ahhh. Let me think. What was his name again? uh ... Blade! Blade used the theme from, was it Blackbelt Jones, hold on [he sings the melodic line of the instruments] dad a, duna daaa. I have to think now, I don't think



it was Blackbelt Jones because that was different. Doesn't matter. Was it Money Runner? I don't care. Whatever, but so, they were using breakbeats, and usual rap music especially in the early '90s when you listen to New York rap it was getting slower and slower. Basically it was music that you could only smoke to, you know and so breaking to that music was almost impossible.

And then by the mid '90s, L.A. was taking over. In L.A. it started to be the big fashion, b-boying started to be the big fashion again and they were using slow hip-hop beats and that's why the way they were dancing in Los Angeles turned out to be completely different from how we were dancing in Europe and also why they were dancing completely different from what used to be called, you know like the old school style from New York. You know and only when they started to use break beats again and when they got into breaks, that's when in L.A. it changed completely again and they were coming back more and more to the, to the b-boy style.

You can see like when you look at the first Freestyle Session, for instance, videos, and you look at the Freestyle videos from early 2000s or mid-2000s then you see the big difference and that is always because of the music. Same thing when you look at the different dance styles. You know, when you look at the popping for instance. When you look at the popping style they were doing in the late '70s, when they were mainly dancing to funk music, you know like to a live [play?] funk, maybe with some talkbox, maybe like Zapp and Roger, then you see that the style is still more bouncy. And it's different to what people were doing in the early '80s when the electro funk was taking over, you know, so you see that most of the time the key is in the music.<sup>17</sup>

Storm is making a link between the development of different dance moves and styles and the performance of musical tastes by b-boys and b-girls, at local events in various countries. Storm demonstrates how local crews had preferences for music that informed the development of dances, and that b-boys and b-girls organised those historical shifts along musical lines. For

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Niels "Storm" Robitzky at a workshop in Erfurt, Germany, August, 2008.

example, Storm and his friends were listening to rap music produced in the UK and they called this style “Britcore.”<sup>18</sup>

DJ Renegade, a well-known international DJ for b-boy events, mentioned earlier, was a DJ for one of the early 1990s British rap groups. He began popping, breaking, locking and doing jazz fusion in 1982. In London, before electronic music became fashionable, many people in his locale were listening to reggae. In his memory, that period marked a shift from reggae to electronic music. By 1986, breaking had just about died out and Renegade began to DJ. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he discovered that people were still breaking a lot in other countries like Hungary, Germany and France. During this time he attended gigs in Sweden, Germany and France and would encounter the UK crew, *Second to None* and Storm’s crew, *Battle Squad*. During that time, the music they were dancing to was funk and breaks. Renegade explained:

The music goes through phases. More disco sounds were popular 4 or 5 years ago. At the moment the music is very Latin. Period of raw drum breaks.

There is no reason to assume that b-boys and b-girls only dance to particular musical tracks or genres. What matters most to them is how a b-boy or b-girl, “rocks the beat,” in other words *how* they dance to the music. However, there are breaks and songs that are ‘safe;’ that even the most novice of dancer should be able to name with confidence to show their insider status. This was not always the case.

Ken Swift, from New York City, explained to younger b-boys, on his travels around the world, what music suits this dance. He did so by naming

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<sup>18</sup> see Appendix D “Britcore Rap”.

tracks. When he returned to the various spots he had been to, he found that b-boys and b-girls were getting down to entire songs, rather than just the break beats, and that the songs were being played at events in their entirety. He then corrected his earlier point further, to explain that b-boys get down *only* on the break beats. As an example, he would use the lyrics from, “Dance to the drummer’s beat” as an illustration of what this dance is about, i.e. dancing to the break of a song when the percussion section takes over.

Here authority frames musical tastes. Musical tastes often develop in line with education about the dance, although clearly I have shown examples where individual dancers are still informed by their own personal preferences or by local influences and inspirations.

Videos have also been significant in the development of musical tastes. Event and crew videos often feature entire songs that become affiliated with the dance and are played in various new places. As a DJ recently joked to me, at events new b-boys will often request from him the name of a crew, rather than the name of a song, having associated a particular crew with a song that they perform to on a video, rather than caring about the actual name of the song. However, the longer people practice breaking, the more they are informed and shaped by the authorities of the dance (mainly older generations of b-boys from New York City). As one documentary filmmaker explained, he found it difficult to interview younger b-boys in various countries for his project about history or preferences because they were afraid to get it ‘wrong.’

This is how the group experience of taste operates. Instantly, it becomes apparent that international sharing, alongside historical shifts and distinctions

between various locales - including trends and fashions for particular genres of music – are informed by questions of belonging. These questions of belonging are often centred on musical tastes. Movement preferences follow along from these musical tastes, but only sometimes. This will become even more apparent as I consider shifts in the centres of authority and creativity in the chapter on international competitions. Breaking, like the music that accompanies it, keeps changing over time. And, as I argue in the chapters that follow, tastes also change the more they stay the same.

For my participants, their relationship to music also deepened through their dance practices, leading them to new sounds, which then led them to new dance styles and musical practices. They performed particular musical tastes to attract sexual partners or to think about their dance practice artistically in new combinations of music and dance. DJs described the need and desire to understand the taste of individual dancers in order to bring out their best dance performances, and dancers expressed appreciation for DJs who accomplished this feat thoughtfully.

In the context of global sociability, musical tastes are often a source of both tension and belonging. For example, one dancer from the UK recalled attending a practice in another country where everyone was training to heavy metal. He felt that they did not have anything in common with him when practicing together, and that he did not enjoy dancing with them to this genre of music. For this reason, the last section of this chapter will consider how DJs figure out the tastes of dancers in an international context of competitions, alongside various locales.

## How International DJs Learn about Local Tastes

Although dancers will often pass along information about musical tracks to each other, it is also the case that DJs will specifically *not* pass along information and tracks to dancers. This is one of the key distinctions between DJs and b-boys. Both often try to keep certain knowledge to themselves: for the b-boys it is how they do their signature moves, and for DJs it is the rare music tracks from which they have taken their break beats. B-boys share music with each other, whereas DJs are more protective of that information.

DJs do, however, share the music that they love at jams. In breaking, or DJing for breaking, I came across examples of New York DJs who learned some of the craft and art of DJing for b-boys from DJs from London, England, or DJs from London touring to play at gigs in Texas, NYC, South Korea and California. I asked DJ Renegade, who plays international events, how he chooses music in new places. He explained that often, when he is invited to play an event somewhere, he will hang out with and crash<sup>19</sup> at the house of a local b-boy crew or event organiser. Since he is hanging out with the dancers, he gets to learn about their musical tastes through casual conversations, about the topics that b-boys are always eager to talk about (music, and music they love to break to). If he is in a new area where he does not yet know a lot about the scene, he will pick an eclectic mix of songs and see how the b-boys are responding to them. He will begin to home in on the styles that are popular in that area, and he will do so by watching people dance. Other DJs described how it is important for a DJ to define their individual sound to build a career. But also, at international

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<sup>19</sup>Slang for “staying over night” at a friend’s place.

competitions it is important to play it 'safe' so people do not complain.

One event organiser, who runs an annual international b-boy competition, mentioned his difficulty in finding good DJs. In this large, extended network of b-boys it seems that there are fewer DJs that are qualified or experienced in playing music for competitions or events. This is further complicated by events at which dancers in the entire family of hip hop and funk styles are present, to compete and cypher. Another DJ pointed out that you have to be able to recognise the style of dance someone is doing in the circle, and to continue with songs which that group, or style of dancers prefers, while the energy is high in a cypher battle. This requires the DJs to have *dance* knowledge as one aspect of their musical competence.

Considerations of musical taste are central to this thesis. Not only is music important for dance practice, but it is part of the aesthetic of this dance. The collective tastes of dancers are negotiated with each other, and with the DJs who act the part of intermediaries. Songs are selected that have qualities deemed to encourage dance: their 'danceability,' but dance is also about expression and feelings from within that resemble the dance structure. Musical tastes are competitive and relational. Competing tastes within breaking culture indicate 'phases' in tastes, as tastes fill in the various necessities of particular situations, contexts, places and modes of performance. Tastes also change over time and with dance practice.

The informal or peer-to-peer learning of breaking at the local level has changed over time into a multigenerational exchange, with subsequent changes to the way that the dance is learned locally. When learning happens in

international, or at least cross-cultural exchanges that are becoming increasingly formalised, they fundamentally alter understandings of breaking as a cultural practice informed by tastes and dispositions.

In the international climate of breaking, taste is immersed in education practices, and is thus tightly bound to issues of authority. Meanwhile, the musical phases of the dance are cyclical. In this sense, practice itself is never static, nor is musical taste.

## Chapter 5: Crews (*An Extended Family Affair*)

In the previous chapter, taste was discussed as a collective matter which dancers negotiate with each other. In this chapter, I demonstrate how multigenerational crews come to organise their experiences and relationships, including those related to matters of taste. The purpose of this is to begin to understand how crews in different countries relate to one another, how the work of dance practice is passed along from one generation of dancers to the next, and how crews often have a *multicultural* legacy. These elements set up some challenges to current understanding of hip hop's appropriation and re-working in various places.

Crews have been a part of breaking culture since its earliest days in New York City. The difference between the crews then and now is the *multigenerational* component of many crew formations. Therefore, this chapter considers the centrality of crews to breaking culture, while simultaneously addressing the multigenerational component of many crews today and the impact of this on the aesthetics of the dance.

In my research, I came across crews that had very little in common in terms of their formation, aspirations and practice. A brief description of a few different crew formations will reveal how crews organise around aspirations, and how these are also, indeed, what break them up.

The first crew formation consists of people who began dancing together because they had all shown up to take classes at the local dance studio with an



old school b-boy in their city. Those that were keen to take their practice more seriously in the class formed a crew. They began to train together and to battle, as well as socialising together (they were in their early 20s when they began). The group consisted of about seven or eight formal members and they gave themselves a name. A few years in, they wanted to do shows to earn money and some of the members aspired to more professional levels. Some of the members could not make it out to rehearsals consistently, due to work or other engagements, and soon enough, those that felt they were training the most decided to kick out other members of the crew who, they felt, were not as dedicated as they were. They then became a group of four, and continued to build their reputation, eventually going on to teach younger, developing crews in their area. About ten years on, one of them has become a professional theatre dancer, another a community event organiser, another an aspiring dancer and the final one is still finishing his education. They rarely compete now and no longer perform together on a consistent basis.

Another crew formation began with two key members who started the crew together. They are mainly self-taught, although they travel to other cities to learn as much as they possibly can. They have gone through different additional members, constantly teaching and training new talent who eventually quit or leave for other crews. They have a policy that if someone trains with them often enough and shows commitment, then they are 'put down'<sup>1</sup> with the crew. If they do not attend practices enough, the crew may decide to kick them out. Crew B has put down international members who have

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<sup>1</sup> Slang for becoming part of a crew. Officially being recognised as part of a crew.

lived in their city for a while and who trained while they were there. Although this crew also aspires to do professional shows, they are more willing to accept new members and are constantly growing in number. The crew is still going, with new members coming in and out all of the time.

Finally, here is a third crew formation. An old school b-boy, who is still a participant in the scene, decided to put together a crew to train to an international level. To begin with, he recruited to the cause the best b-boy he could find. After he had this dancer agreeing to be part of this elite crew, he pulled in other members from the local scene, and he ran a training night where he taught possible new talent. When he sees something in a dancer, usually discipline, work ethic or determination, he begins to coach them. He pays attention to their conditioning, shows them new moves and also watches videos with them to teach them about the aesthetics of the dance. He leads the crew and decides who gets to battle, who is part of the crew and also helps to get them performances. They rarely take in new members, but some of the members also dance for another crew with different aspirations (to be known as good cypher dancers, rather than necessarily on international stages). The crew has achieved a high degree of success and is known internationally.

Later on in this chapter, I will provide examples from other crews, as well as giving some attention to how individual members work, both within the group and independently, to build their reputations. However, from these first three examples, what becomes clear is that leadership is one of the key distinguishing factors between the organisation of the various groups. Crew A began as a group of peers, all at the same level, who looked up to an older b-boy,

but one who was not actively involved in the crew as a member making decisions. In Crew B, two peers began together and began to encourage younger b-boys and b-girls that they could put down in their crew. They also put down members who had been kicked out of other crews, thus presenting a more inclusive picture of belonging. Their aspiration was as much to keep the crew going, as it was to become professional in an institutional sense. Crew C was the brainchild of an older b-boy who knew how to get a group of dancers committed to the cause, by soliciting the involvement of a b-boy who had already made a reputation for himself. The coach was the clear leader of the crew and also made an effort to teach new talent, as did members of each of the three crews described. In these examples, group-desired goals also play a key part in the involvement of participants.

Crews are centered on a shared desire to practice breaking. Although they may have the same musical taste, style of dress, education and class this is certainly not always the case, as a few later examples, as well as the ones that I have just mentioned, suggest. Crews are also, for the most part, multicultural in make-up. B-boys and b-girls form alliances across ethnic groups, even though b-boys and b-girls are often inspired by those who look like them or who have a similar family background. People spoke about being inspired by b-boys and b-girls that resembled them. For example, if someone is tall they may be inspired by other tall b-boys that are talented; the same is true for females of other females, for the old and still dancing, or the disabled. All of these factors, alongside ethnicity, proved to be inspirational characteristics for b-boys and b-girls with whom I spoke.

Some crews consider themselves to be hip hop crews, and thus consist of b-boys, emcees, graffiti artists, poppers, and DJs, acquiring a larger status in a variety of distinct worlds. Others consist only of b-boys. Crews with b-girls are more rare, and sometimes b-girls in a city begin their own crew consisting only of females. Most crews are all males, although occasionally crews have female members. It is quite common for a crew to have only one female member.

To understand a particular b-boy's or b-girl's position within a crew, it is important to understand the networks, alliances and friendships that provide the context to their practice, and, in most cases, crews are key determinants of the direction in which a b-boy or b-girl will develop their practice. This includes how they come to think about the dance and which aesthetics they will prefer.

#### What is a Crew?

The meaning and purpose of a crew, within breaking culture, is a hotly debated subject. Like rock bands (Cohen 1991), breaking crews often regard themselves as a 'family'. This analogy expresses an authentic relationship between the members beyond their practice to suggest a closeness and type of bonding. However, this description also provides tension between some crews and other crews, who they would argue are inauthentic and not like a family.

For example, b-boy Remind, who is from a crew with an international reputation, Style Elements, suggests:

I see crews, ... people that are just in a bunch of crews and they don't represent nothing. You know, they don't even represent the dance. ... They ain't got no loyalty ... That's what separates the wack from the dope ... Crew loyalty was everything ... Your crew is your crew ... It's your game, it's your peoples, it's your tribe.

You have to have love and loyalty to that ... It is who you are, you're always that ... But I think people now just jump into crews to enter contests and so then they think when they enter the contest with the crew that that's like initiation or something. So all these guys enter contests with each other, and so now they're like, "Oh we're a crew ... We're in a crew together." And, it's like that family, and that ... spiritually isn't connected there. So there's a lot of fake crews out there. There's a lot of made up crews. There's a lot of generic crews ... There's a lot of lost crews out there ... They don't understand ... Style Elements [his crew], we were a family of friends first ... and then we made an alliance to be Style Elements. Most of these crews have no roots so they're gonna fall ....  
B-boy Remind, Style Elements crew, Mighty 4TV <sup>2</sup>(online)

Breaking has always revolved around crews, as groups of individuals who formally decide to make their affiliation with each other known to the public. They name their crew, compete together, and decide how to enact and negotiate their crew politics. Each crew has a collective reputation based on their abilities to dance and win at performances. Even from the onset of b-boy culture, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, older b-boys would often mentor younger ones. However, the age gap in this master/apprentice relationship has expanded substantially now that the practice is decades old. Also, more b-girls began to be trained up seriously by b-boys in the mid 1990s, and to claim their place in the culture.

Since crews battle together, and there is more and more at stake in larger international competitions, some contests have tried to set boundaries or criteria for dancers as to what makes up a crew. The idea of people organising a crew of elite b-boys, rather than a crew consisting of people who practice

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<sup>2</sup> "Mighty4TV: Christie Z Pabon & BBoy Remind Style Elements"  
<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGkdSgumrFQ&feature=player\\_embedded#](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGkdSgumrFQ&feature=player_embedded#)>  
[Accessed August 24, 2010]

together in one locale, leads to questions of fairness, meaning, and cultural codes and practices within hip hop culture. These new developments and concerns reveal just how central the codes and conduct around crews have been to breaking culture to date. (In a recent Master Workshop, the teacher suggested that a collective of dancers is not a crew unless they do crew routines.)

The social dynamics within a crew are quite complex. Some crews have an acknowledged and agreed upon working leader (known often, in long-standing American crews, as the 'president,' or in the UK, I have heard one b-boy referred to as 'coach'). This is someone who leads the way in determining the groups' decisions, in a variety of matters concerning their activities. These can include: how they dress (for battles, or in general), how often they will train, who they will help, who from their crew will represent each round during battles, who will be let into the crew, and how they will develop as a crew. Sometimes these choices are shared or negotiated among the members of the crew, or they get decided informally or implicitly. However, many crews have a defined leader who acts the role of the tastemaker for the group.

The leader makes decisions, with other members of the crew, which are centered on shared tastes or judgements. These can take the form of deciding who can and who cannot become part of the crew, how often they will practice as a group, and whether they will devise routines. Although initially these decisions may not appear to be aesthetic, decisions such as how often a group practices are in fact central to the crew aesthetic. A crew that wants to acquire

particular power moves<sup>3</sup> to a standard will require specific types of practices, and training in specific venues. In other words, the aesthetic expression of dancers relies on the hours, and the type of practice put into the dance. The amount of time devoted to the dance will seriously affect the skill level.

The leader can also make decisions in a battle about who will dance for the crew in each round, and even, for a meticulous leader, what moves or sets each person will do. This has to do with strategy more than taste, although again it requires some comparative judgements to inform selections for the group.

There are often different generations of members in a crew. Sometimes a crew can die out, only to resurface when younger dancers, remembering that crew's influence in their trajectory, approach the older, non-practicing dancers and ask for their crew name to cite lineage, evoke legacy and authenticity, and carry on traditions. Sometimes one generation of dancers will teach the next. Crews take up the principle of 'each one teach one'<sup>4</sup>, and the idea of continuing the crew name then becomes a meaningful narrative and a source of confidence in battles, signifying heritage and lineage.

Sometimes a crew will teach younger dancers, and the younger dancers will form their own crew. For example, in one crew, the younger members adopted an older dancer, originally from another city, to lead them. Later on this had consequences for the chosen leader as the younger b-boys began to enter contests without telling him, to better their chances of being perceived as a

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<sup>3</sup> Power moves are moves that tend to look the most spectacular to onlookers with names such as windmills, head spins, halos, and 1990s. They are distinguished from footwork or downrock.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss this phrase further in Chapter 7.

'youth' group and thus bettering their odds to win.

Within crews, dancers often share secrets about moves and techniques that they would not explain to people outside of their crew. As one dancer in Leeds pointed out, sometimes in larger practices, which everyone in the city attends, members of a crew will help out beginning dancers with potential, to an extent. However as soon as these beginners get to a level of being competitive with the crew members themselves, in terms of skill, the crew will stop helping them progress, unless they eventually decide to put them down in the crew.

Although crews tend to practice together, sometimes members can keep moves they are working on secret from their own crew, an exception to the observations above. Some crews make sure not to let others see them in practice, unless they are performing moves that have already been made public in battles. One dancer I spoke with said that he does not even show his new works in progress to his own crew. B-boys and b-girls do not necessarily want other dancers to look like them or to share moves with them (without permission). This has to do with morality issues in the dance practice. B-boys and b-girls cannot copyright movements or protect their ideas for movement. Toronto b-boys tried to combat this in the 1990s by developing styles so fast that no one could figure out what they were doing. Also, b-boys in New York City and Toronto explained to me how they would try not to show their moves when someone was videotaping. This was to protect their moves from "biters"<sup>5</sup>. These are older mentalities in the dance form and, as I will demonstrate in

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<sup>5</sup> This is a negative label given to dancers who copy the moves of other dancers frequently and do so in recognisable ways.



Chapter 11, these anxieties around mediation have changed dramatically over the course of breaking's history.

Other dancers started out as a crew that all practiced in the same city, but then they mostly moved to different cities and built in new members there, or disbanded. Some dancers are in more than one crew; some crews have dancers from different cities that have been put down without extended rehearsals together.

Crews that are initially forming tend to come together around shared musical taste and the desire to practice breaking. As crew members begin to desire more paying gigs and income, this professionalisation tends to be divisive. Often it is when money becomes involved that crews will begin to get rid of members who are not seen to be progressing at the level desired for professional gigs, or who are not available often enough for all the practice necessary to prepare for the performances. Some crew members are also perceived to get 'greedy' with sponsorships, and when they do not distribute payments or clothes 'fairly' with other crew members this can cause the crew to fight or to break up.

Crews that are already established have different policies for accepting new members. Often dancers have to hang out with the crew long enough, either as students or as friends, and prove that they have acquired the right level of ability to battle with them. One dancer I spoke with mentioned that his crew said he could not battle with them yet because he is not ready. In this case, the member was put down in the crew, but as a group they had decided that he was not ready to represent their name yet, publicly. They would however share

knowledge with him, hence the benefit of putting him down in the crew before letting him showcase his, as yet underdeveloped, skills.

On the international scale there are different problems that face crews that also reveal how networks operate. Better known crews tend to pick off talented members from lesser-known crews. This is often a mutual act, where the up and coming dancers want to be affiliated with the well-known crew (whose crew name is already established) because this will legitimise them. What this also does for the better-known crew is that it sustains their name, and re-establishes that they are the crew to beat by absorbing potential threats. Unfortunately problems can occur in how this works spatially. For example, if a larger or more well established crew puts down members from another locale, then the new members have to make decisions about whether to quit their old crews or represent both. This can have the effect of breaking up a crew at the local level, as the more talented dancers leave to tour and train with the better-known names. In such a case, the local crew thus loses one of its key members and can often disintegrate.

The well-known historical example in the breaking world is that of a German b-boy named Niels “Storm” Robitzky, who went to New York City and was asked to join the Rocksteady Crew, but instead remained in his own crew, Battle Squad. However, one of his fellow crew members did join the Rocksteady Crew and this caused a split in Battle Squad. This particular example is complex, as Storm’s fellow crew member was from Italy and Storm was from Germany. They came to New York City to learn more about the dance, and while there they developed different interests and goals. In another, lesser known example,

Gizmo from Toronto was also put down with Rocksteady Crew but continued to dance with his local crew, Bag of Trix. Bag of Trix continued to dance together throughout the 1990s and became known internationally during this decade. Here the two crews were compatible, with Bag of Trix sharing the stage with Rocksteady Crew at one of their Anniversaries in New York City. Future politics aside, these two crews had formed an alliance of sorts, serving two different locales, as well as participating together in international engagements.

Both of the examples above are from the history of the dance. However, the international game changed quickly with new technologies, and the possibilities for travel leading to a significant increase in the popularity of the dance. This will be explored next through a case study of a b-boy, Dyzee, who made his name internationally in the 2000s.

Crews can often be centered on charismatic leaders who inspire others to dance through their creativity, abilities or force of personality and individual style. This means that if those central dancers are picked off by larger, international crews, this can seriously diminish the practice of others, including their local crew. Crews can have a fleeting quality, as crew members reorganise their allegiances. When crews talk about coming together to build an ‘alliance,’ this is usually an attribute of breakers thinking of each other as equally talented, and contributing different strengths to the crew as a whole unit, larger than the sum of one individual, charismatic dancer.

#### Karl “Dyzee” Alba: A Case in Point

This section provides a small case study of an individual dancer’s

relationships to his crew and to other dancers, both locally and internationally. It does so to give some biographical and local context for the multigenerational extensions of crews. Borrowing the notion that b-boys have presented, that their crew is like a family, a resemblance with the *extended* family is established here, where this relates to the relationship of individual dancers not only to crew members from other cities but also to older dancers who guide them and play the part of 'father' figures. To invoke the image of an extended family suggests that dancers feel responsible for each other in ways similar to those in kin relationships, and this has multigenerational components. This notion of the crew as a family by no means suggests a celebratory analysis of crew dynamics. Rather, like a family, crews involve break-ups, fights, and people moving away or quitting. In other words, the extended family analogy covers issues of feuds, gendered exclusions, and familial expectations and reorganisations.

Dyzee, a Canadian b-boy in his early thirties, recalls that he started dancing in 1994, when he had just turned fourteen years old. During the summer time in Toronto he saw breaking, and as soon as he saw it he started to try it out. The first local crews he saw were Bag of Trix, Intrikit and Supernaturalz, as well as the dancer, Crazy Legs and Bag of Trix crew on television. When he was first learning the dance he recalls:

I wasn't thinking, "I'm going to practice". It was just whenever I had time I would practice. I would just fool around all the time. Eventually I started getting good on my own. Plus, I used to go to all ages clubs and see breaking. I wouldn't even know what they did but I would see tricks and wonder how they did that and I would go home and try to make something up. Maybe it was similar and maybe it was different.

Around the same time, Dyzee got involved with 'racial wars', through gang involvement in Toronto. This pitted "Asians" against "Blacks", and students at different schools were "hunting" each other down. Making a choice to leave for six months for the Philippines (where his parents are from), he ended up staying in a seminary and not practising much. When he returned, most of his crew had quit dancing. However some started up again, and they used to break at a recreation centre in the Scarborough town centre. This was part of an initiative to open a youth centre to deal with problems of youth violence. Here he was mentored by an older b-boy, Lego:

Lego, the oldest member in my crew, the guy that was like a father figure to me, he was still coming and still dancing every Friday. So every Friday that's what I was looking forward to and I started meeting all the kids there, the punks and we formed a crew, Skills to Kill. And we were all a bunch of friends. In '99 we entered the Unsung B-boy battle [in Toronto] and that's the first battle that we/I ever entered and we won that in '99.

An older b-boy being treated like a father figure was a common trope in my interviews with other dancers as well. The involvement of particular individuals in the crew reveals some other important factors about aesthetic choices and familial-like ties in the formation of this specific type of social group.

So me and Lego talked and we decided that we were going to start Supernaturalz and bring everyone from Skills to Kill into Supernaturalz. So that's the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation [of the crew], we started getting big and battling everybody. Then we started meeting people and expanding out of Toronto so we met Jester and Trix from Hamilton, that's when I met Jessefx from Seattle and she joined the crew, Abgirl and Problem Child from New Jersey so they joined the crew. So it was more outside influences, that's how the 4<sup>th</sup> generation came about. (There are 6<sup>th</sup> generations now.) After that, we got so cocky that we were winning all the battles that we decided we weren't going to let nobody into the crew anymore. The 5<sup>th</sup> generation is when we decided to open up the doors again and we brought in Puzzles,

who is now one of the biggest guys in Toronto who usually battles. This guy Rubexcube who used to be Ground Illusionz. There was Lee (Lethal) whose like my little brother that I've known forever and Antics, his friend, Ozzy.

The different generations of b-boys and b-girls depend on the general time period when they joined. For example, there are only two years between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generations of the crew, but three years between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generations. There is also a dimension of respect for the elders that is present in decisions such as who to let into the crew. When I asked who decided who enters the crew and whether this was up to particular people, Dyzee said that:

We were just a bunch of friends. But I know a lot of guys look up to me to make decisions. Jester started becoming the oldest. Everyone always still looks up to Lego but then he's become very relaxed, he goes: whatever you guys want to do. Everyone respects his opinion the most. Right now it's the most organized where I'm considered the president, or the leader. Then you have guys that are still at the same level as me but don't try to push the crew as hard which is Jesse [that's Jester referenced earlier], J-Rebel, Puzzles... We'd probably consider Lego the owner.

At the time of this particular interview, August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, Dyzee was aware of his international reputation and suggested that he is well known outside of Canada because he has had longevity. He has won the most international one-on-one competitions, and has been asked to judge competitions more than anyone else. He acknowledged that there were two other well-known b-boys from Canada who were also rated internationally and who had come before him, such as Gizmo, from Bag of Trix, and Megus, from the Boogie Brats, who was originally in Supernaturalz but left to join the other crew.

Dyzee would mention, in a conversation later on, how the first generation members of his crew think it is funny that what began as a "black"

crew, now has its legacy carried on by mainly “white” and “Asian” kids (some crew members are biracial). The older generations are happy that their name is still around and that the crew is so successful internationally.

#### The Family Analogy Returns

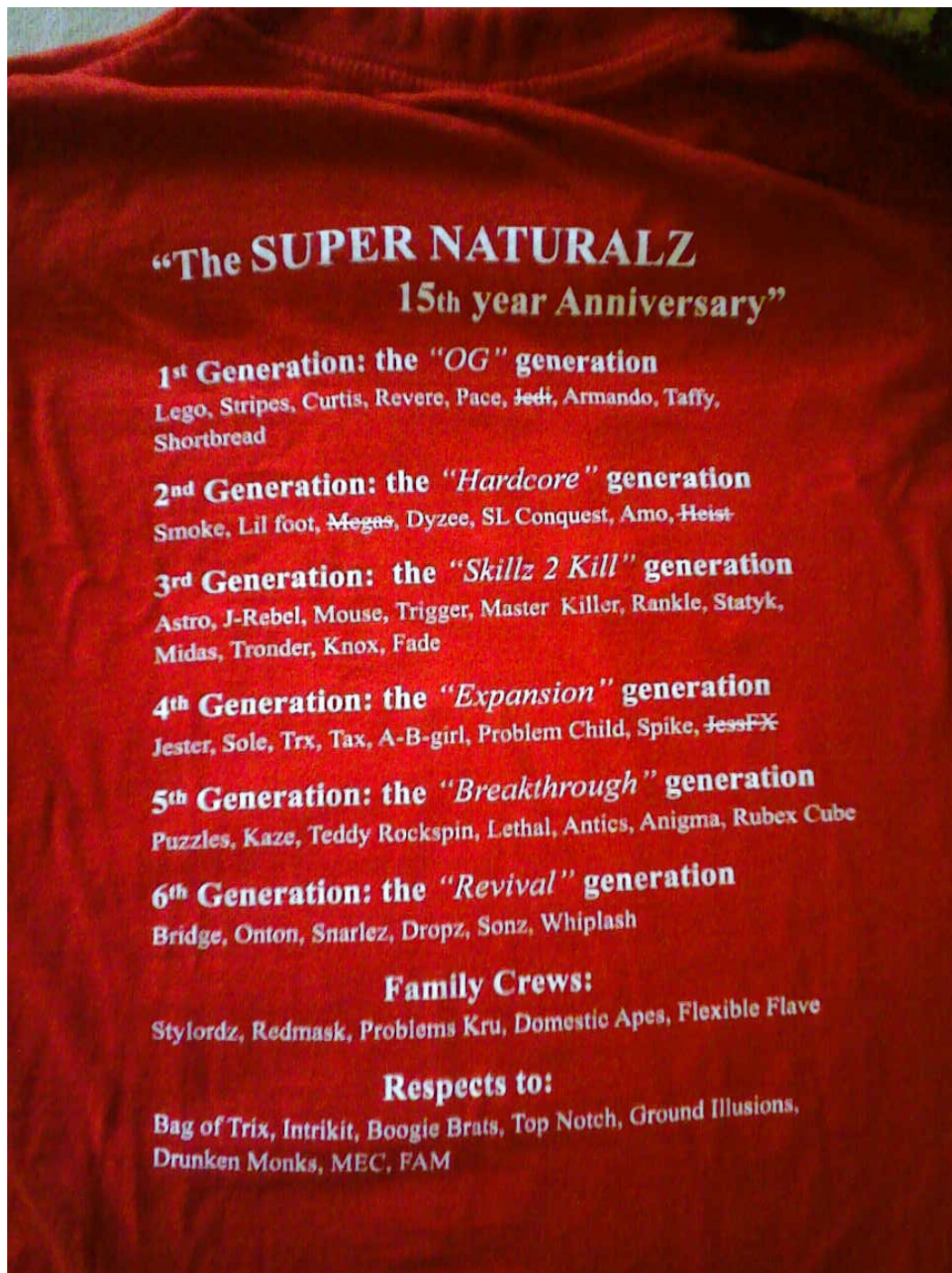
In interviews, b-boys and b-girls frequently say that their crew is (like) their family, and as Dyzee explained in the last section, his crew consisted of a group of friends with one b-boy, Lego, who was like a father figure to him. What does the analogy of the ‘family’ offer b-boys and b-girls? In the literature about breaking it was often indicated that the use of the term ‘family’ was common. With the continuation of this form of dance, the family analogy has changed from a one-dimensional signification for the closeness of friends who participate in a shared activity to become *extended* families that are multigenerational in composition.

These extended families involve alliances between crews at the local and regional levels, as well as affiliations with other crews and individual dancers in different areas of the world.

Thus breaking events turn into the equivalent of family reunions – a celebration of varying degrees of friendship and skills, exchanged across various locales. If different crews of dancers in different parts of the world are making translocal networks (Fogarty 2006), then how do these crews understand and describe their relationships with each other?

For an event to celebrate their 15<sup>th</sup> year as a crew, the Supernaturalz crew from Toronto made t-shirts. This is a picture of the back of one of the

shirts:



There are many 'generations' of b-boys and b-girls in the crew, and each one is given a generational label that describes their contribution to the group. There are also crew members who are crossed out; who left the crew (as the



stories go). Below the generations of dancers there is a list of 'family crews' that are all crews located in different cities. Below that, "respects" are given to other crews that are also mainly located in Toronto.

There are other negotiations of family expansions that I came across during this research. For example, recently a UK crew, consisting of biological parents and children, among other members, was 'put down' with a crew from New York City. One of the many styles of crew t-shirts for their crew has both crew names on the back, along with the name of each individual dancer. This is how they represent visually alliances that would not be otherwise apparent.

Female dancers in crews tend to be a tricky subject. B-girls are often trained up by b-boys, and so are less likely to want to complain to outsiders to the culture about unfair treatment, even though this treatment occurs. I have heard stories of b-girls being kicked out of legendary, and local crews because of a break-up with their boyfriend who was also in the crew. Females are regularly discredited for their achievements, which are often attributed to boyfriends (this includes moves as well). Also, b-girls are held to stricter moral regimes in the culture, in terms of sexual partners. It is an accepted part of the culture that b-boys on tour or travelling, or even locally, tend to 'go wild' or to have many sexual partners. However, the stories heard about b-girls are that they are considered 'sluts' if they have had more than one boyfriend who also breaks, in their lifetime. Many b-boys complain about getting into trouble with girlfriends because of the amount of time they spend b-boying, or with their crews.

B-girls are more likely to quit dancing when they start dating a b-boy, or when they break up with one. During my field research I did come across one

case of the opposite experience, where a b-boy who had been dancing longer than his ex-partner as part of the local scene, felt like he could not come out anymore and that the b-girl was more a part of everything. Also, oddly, in my research in Great Britain, most of the b-girls who broke up with a b-boy in a particular locale actually moved cities so they could continue dancing. That is how strongly the smaller scenes were focused on central crews, made up of a group of friends who practiced b-boying together.

Some of the most well known breaking crews in the world have female crew members. A female promoter who wanted to manage a winning breaking crew from France insisted that they kick out their b-girl before she would represent them. The crew refused and the b-girl is still dancing with her crew. Many crews that have stayed together for a long time, resembling a 'family', rather than a loose affiliation, are less likely to be swayed by the industry to transform their crew or to get rid of members in the pursuit of professionalisation.

#### Crew Politics

As mentioned in the last section, local crews will join or align themselves sometimes with crews that have already established a reputation. The larger crews often hope to increase their influence worldwide through attracting new members and refreshing their reputations. The careers of older b-boys and b-girls depend on a continuous stream of younger dancers interested in learning the dance.

When b-boys and b-girls venture into new areas, as they get older, crews

experience many transformations. People quit dancing, move away or form new alliances. In this sense, the idea of the crew as a family has, surprisingly, begun to diminish as the longevity of crews increases. Likewise, global sociability has both strained and reinforced crew mentalities in various ways. However, the crew still remains a central way through which b-boys and b-girls organise their experiences and competitions. Whether or not crews will maintain a family analogy through their musical tastes and collective creativity in the coming decades has yet to be seen.

Individuals fit into the collective, creative work of breaking crews. This involves alliances, affinities, and shared aesthetic tastes. The idea of the family has also extended to signify the position of breaking within the context of a 'family' of hip hop and funk styles including popping, locking and in some competitions, events and functions other styles such as house, and new style.

Crews, I would argue, develop a level of shared intensity. They share, through that experience, the work of dance and an understanding of what it takes to do this activity. If dancers share one or two of the same foundational movements, that enhances the shared experience and the interpretation between them that they are communicating similar experiences. If they both hit the beats of the music, they are confirming that they are both hearing the rhythm of the song.

Within breaking culture there are separate moral issues that involve giving credit to your influences and teachers, telling others where moves came from and not copying the movements of other dancers whom you train with or

have seen on videos. The terminology, 'biting'<sup>6</sup> is a quick hand into these issues. The very fact that there is vernacular to describe this value illustrates the centrality of the concern for dancers.

#### Ageing Bodies and Musical Competence

The role that older b-boys now play in crews is the part of an 'extended family' for younger members of the crew. At this point, I will introduce some considerations addressing physicality in relation to ageing bodies. Also, I would like to suggest the significance of older b-boys as not only 'father' figures but also as carriers of musical tastes that shape the cultural and technical education and development of younger b-boys and b-girls.

Goffman (1953, 1956) introduced the concept of dramaturgy to sociology: social actors as performers. I suggest that dance is a vital way that people perform their musical tastes, and as such, the bodies of ageing dancers must be taken into account as significant factors in this expression. I could compare older b-boys to 'directors', both in actuality (as choreographers and coaches for younger dancers) and metaphorically (as event organisers, DJs, music producers, teachers, and archivists). Only here the dramaturgy analogy of Goffman gives way instead to a familial one.

In other words, this chapter has explored the significance of a shift in b-boy culture towards an extended, multigenerational family. I argue that the family analogy draws attention to issues of gender and conflict, such as b-girls keeping the discrimination based on 'gender' quiet and in the 'private' scene of

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<sup>6</sup> cf. the section, "Biting", in Chapter 6.

the sphere rather than sharing it with others. The notion of family also functions simultaneously to indicate the sincerity through which dancers perform their friendships for each other. This approach builds on the concepts of crews and musical tastes. However, when reviewing the extended family, all sorts of new questions about the nature of crews arise. Here I suggest that older b-boys and b-girls have developed a particular understanding of musical competence that relates to not only their continuing practice and teaching but also to a listening practice that *changes the more it stays the same*.

One could look at breaking from a perspective akin to sports, as a way to think about the ageing body in music scenes. In this case, the bodies of young dancers are more limber, but as they build technique over time the body begins to wear. And as dancers become more skilled and experienced as competitors, they are able to utilise and preserve energy through prior lessons they have learned. At the same time, all the dancers I spoke with, aged over thirty-five agreed that the technical level of the dance has progressed so rapidly that they cannot keep up anymore. Yet, somehow, they do continue to maintain their expression and impress younger b-boys with their smoothness, dancing abilities and years of experience. This is displayed through their larger vocabularies of movement, knowledge about music and confidence.

Simon Frith (1983) wrote that if you never got into popular music you were never really young. The logical extension of this might be that if you never 'grow out' of popular music tastes (and maintain your dance practice) then this is like drinking from the fountain of youth. However, as I have mentioned, the body does wear. And just like the quest for the fountain of youth, I came across

dancers who had the desire to become young again; that is, to get back into their dance practice, often after time away from the dance and the dance scene.

For some participants, their enthusiasm never waned for the dance, but actually it was the scene itself (and the people that comprise hip hop culture) which turned them away from showing up; whether this was the violence that occurred in New York City in the late 1970s, where rockers were getting stabbed at parties for being good, or the experience of a b-girl in Northern England who told friends she was sick of the politics and often misogynist attitudes of fellow dancers.

When older b-boys and b-girls teach younger dancers, they change the social nature of the dance. Rather than being a youthful rebellion, the dance transitions into a tradition with local affiliations and concerns of legacy. The body becomes the holder of memory, history and technique. The ageing body finds its pleasure in training, conditioning and teaching (a display of competence). However, older b-boys also want to impose their values on the culture, as the earlier remark of Remind's demonstrated. They want to explain the most valuable parts of their participation with the dance because these are the experiences that they wish to prolong and relive through supporting younger b-boys and b-girls. As the ageing audience of the dance, they also want to be inspired.

For Remind, as for many others, the crew mentality is one of the aspects of the culture that he feels is worth preserving; the group of friends that have loyalty and are just like a family. However, the continuing involvement of older dancers has made this belonging consist of more than just a group of peers. It

has become rather an extended family of dancers from other cities, and from other generations. This complicates loyalty and family-like behaviour at the local level. Older dancers train younger ones, and the politics of crews with other local crews are passed along to the next generation of dancers, causing family feuds that extend, in some cases, beyond ten years. Newer participants often become overly invested in politics that are only to do with their affiliations, not their own experiences. They do this to demonstrate loyalty.

This chapter has set up the analogy of the 'extended family' with breaking crews. Again, I do not intend this comparison to suggest that crews are the picturesque family. Rather, they are very much like real families, that have divorces, kids who get kicked out, grandparents who die young, fights on a daily basis and family reunions on occasions. In this sense, breaking crews are like families of today: short-lived, ever-changing in group dynamics, experiencing issues with belonging, and negotiated along non-biological terms. This way of thinking about crews, as multigenerational, multicultural and international in composition is useful for what is to come in the next chapter about the development of an 'international aesthetic' or a return to 'foundations', and what this means for crews centred in particular localities outside of New York City.

## Chapter 6: Ageing into an International Aesthetic

“If you love this dance what ultimately are you in it for? To make an impact right? A *global* impact beyond just the moves and even the dance. How are you going to do that?<sup>1</sup>”

Donnie “Crumbs” Counts, Style Elements crew

The analogy of the ‘extended family’ has explicitly introduced the reality that at this point in the development of breaking culture, crews are multigenerational. This has an impact on the development of what I call an ‘international aesthetic’, which has become a celebrated and contested reality for breakers around the world. The term ‘international aesthetic’ suggests that the agreed upon values and meanings of the ‘essence’ of the dance are negotiated by participants of the dance from across the world, even if the essence is imagined to represent a particular locale or a particular understanding of ‘origins.’ In this chapter I would like to explore how this concept is embodied, performed and navigated by dancers at varying stages in their lives.

The international aesthetic for breaking is relational, judged on explicit comparisons between dancers. However, it is as much about recognition and renown as it is about competition and contestation. This is because reputation not only stacks the competition in one’s favour, but also allows participants central roles in the creation of mutually agreed upon meanings about what constitutes the ‘foundation’ of this dance style. The ‘architects’ of the

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<sup>1</sup> “The Crumbs Chronicles (Webisode 1) 6/7” by Donnie Counts  
<<http://vimeo.com/7033519>> [Accessed December 18, 2010]



international aesthetic shape the meaning of ‘foundations’, as performed by dancers ‘out of context’ of the original time period of the dance. This includes almost all of the dancers still present today, who are all ‘outsiders’ in some way to the original dance as practiced by its first participants, whether they are third generation b-boys in New York City, who began in the early 1980s, or b-girls from Russia winning international competitions.

Following from the previous two chapters, I first explore how an international aesthetic has developed, through the participation of older b-boys and b-girls, and how this relates to their tastes, before exploring how b-boys and b-girls have contested a universalising tendency, or what is also known as the ‘foundation’.

#### Era and Fashion

Breaking, conceived as ‘breakdancing’ in the early 1980s, was not only considered a youth culture, but was also treated as a trend or fashion. In most countries, the dance known as breaking had died out by 1986, although there are some important exceptions to this overview of the history. Around 1986, most of the participants of the dance, who were predominantly young, non-white adult males, moved along to other career paths and creative leisure pursuits. Often the most successful local dancers in a scene began to make transitions into other entertainment career paths, such as becoming a rapper, producer, DJ, radio host or even playing an instrument in a band.

Those who did continue to dance began to take up new dance styles that fitted the music popular at that time. For example, in an online interview,

Remind from Style Elements crew explains that he used to dance a 'foundation' style around 1984. However, his style transformed into one described as self-expression, intended to impress his peers, and was shaped by the local trends of dance in his area. In the present day (2010), he explains the significance of representing a particular era in his dancing:

It's up to us though to put that in [styles from another time period of the dance] because that's our era ... I'm even interested in representing right now in this time, ... '88, '89, '90, '91, '92, '93, '94, '95 flavours, personally, because it was really very revolutionary to me at that time. All these trends that came that spawned from hip hop dance going throughout that time when it did die out in California around '85, '86. And the styles that were coming in at that time, the snake, the club dancing, the Oakland movement ... That's what I try to represent ... <sup>2</sup>

Representing an era is a recent development in breaking, and it is being used here to suggest that, and explain how styles have changed over the history of the dance. Similarly, Gizmo from Toronto's Bag of Trix was influenced by developments in dance styles in his particular locale in the 1990s that informed his dance practice. Some biographical background demonstrates a range of influential sources and materials. Gizmo had a background in both gymnastics and martial arts<sup>3</sup>. He also grew up with influences from the dance and pop music worlds, such as Dick Van Dyck, Sammy Davies Jr, Michael Jackson and musicals. Around 1983, when he was eight years old, breaking "blew up" and he danced for a few years, then stopped and became more involved in martial arts. At thirteen or fourteen he was going to clubs. There were all-ages nights at places in Toronto such as Inner City, RPM (which is now called the

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<sup>2</sup> "The Crumbs Chronicles (Webisode 1) 6/7" by Donnie Counts  
<<http://vimeo.com/7033519>> [Accessed December 18, 2010]

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Gizmo, July 14 2007

Government), Club 44 in Brampton, Club Focus in Toronto, and Club Mecca. He was house dancing. His partner was TicTac and they did hip hop dancing, which was called locally *'95 South Style*. That is what EPMD's<sup>4</sup> dancers did, and it included trendy hip hop dancing moves such as 'the running man' and 'cabbage patch'. From there the dances became more complex, and as Gizmo would describe it, "artistic." He names influences such as Big Daddy Kane's dancers and the local dancers who represented with Maestro Fresh Wes.

In fact, all of the influences that he mentioned demonstrate how significant 'hip hop dances' were to the resurgence of breaking practices, alongside their new stylistic innovations. These dances were influenced by the music that was popular at that time in the local venues, alongside developments in music production. The local club scene had an enormous effect on the dance styles practiced. This link would change in future variations of breaking practice. Although Gizmo ended up in a different line of work than most dancers who remained in 'the scene', the career paths for b-boys and b-girls committed to the dance have splintered off into various types of dance industries and types of employment.

### Beyond the Scene

The concept of 'scene' has been fruitful for the study of popular music in allowing a fluidity and vagueness to what had previously been a limiting concept of 'subcultures' (Straw 1991). Thinking about breaking scenes in comparison to various other music scenes raises two concerns: first, breaking

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<sup>4</sup> EPMD is an American hip hop group from Brentwood, New York.

culture, in its maturity, has built its own, self-sustaining structures in terms of what constitute proper, evaluative judgements and systems; second, the roles of ageing, older participants and generational gaps work differently in other music scenes than in the now *international* breaking world. Highlighting some of those differences could be useful.

In a recent account of the British indie rock scene, Wendy Fonarow (2006) described the layout of a typical indie show and her observations are ripe for comparison with dance scenes. In her account, there are various ‘zones’ of the club where audience members, who inhabit these spaces, take part in very different activities, above and beyond watching the band. In Zone One, near the front of the stage, audience members dance and get sweaty and are generally younger. In contrast, Zone Three is back near the bar, where older audience members, who are also, typically music industry workers, watch the band, chat with each other, and drink beer. Through this account, Fonarow demonstrated how the older audience participants at the gig are more likely to be a part of the infrastructure that shapes and provides a context for the experiences of younger members. Those that participate over a longer period of time take on new roles within that scene that require a different engagement with music and with people. As seen in the account that follows, ageing dancers provide a contour for the dance. However they are also invested in changing the rules of the game so that they can stay in it.

#### Ageing Dancers

The most important development in the ageing breaking scene has been

the creation of an entire infrastructure around the dance that preserves, understands or embraces the dance by its own aesthetic. A fundamental part of this development has been the emergence of a new audience that understands the dance, through their past experiences as dancers. Their involvement creates a contour that also provides the template for an international aesthetic.

Ageing and retired dancers make up a large body of the consistent spectators for breaking events. This is crucial because these audiences support the dance by its own aesthetic, and they strengthen the case for an evaluative framework to be developed in breaking. Aesthetics in both senses get performed. Dance is a performance of musical tastes and older dancers perform judgement in a way that younger dancers cannot. This judgement is not just in terms of judging competitions but is visible in what the older dancers are still doing and teaching, and what music they respond to – and in what ways. Their age and experience add ‘depth’ to peer judgement, as well as to the dance itself, since their ‘aged’ dancing is still defining an aspect of the form. And although they cannot physically move in the ways that they used to, their bodies remember, and they know that one of the most important criteria for aesthetic judgement is not looking at dance, but listening to it. Older dancers also have more authority when vocalising the meanings of the dance, as they see it, and this sociability (of an extended family dynamic) often sifts styles down to a core or essence for reliability and definability. This definability is necessary for legitimising the dance style as an art form.

### Careers and Influence

Today there are international breaking competitions and hip hop theatre companies, and 'street dance' is being taught in dance academies, performing arts programmes and universities. These new developments, of a now well-established dance practice, mean two things for dancers, in the context of this chapter. First, they have a choice of career paths that involve breaking practice, and second, most dancers try out a range of activities and dance practices and tend to blend them professionally. The average age of dancers in the early years of breaking culture was the early teens; now dancers are touring and teaching well into their forties. And, as discussed earlier, although the dance starts out as a leisure activity, older participants in the scene begin to take on new social and professional roles. I would like to introduce how this operates for international breaking culture, where dancers moving into new professional careers actually, physically move around the world to work.

The general categories of work that older dancers tend to inhabit now, in various arenas, include: the breaking competition circuit, the entertainment industry, hip hop theatre, music production and performance, event management and organisation, physiotherapy, personal training, and teaching and education. I will briefly describe the involvement of dancers in each of these career paths before explaining their significance for the development of an international aesthetic.

Many b-boys and b-girls spend their time competing in various events, including large international competitions that happen in a relatively stable annual circuit throughout the world. The large events include: R16 (South

Korea), UK B-Boy Championships (UK), Battle of the Year (was in Germany, now in France), Red Bull BC One (changes countries each year) and Freestyle Session (USA). One b-boy from Finland recently explained to me, “the event organisers are my sponsors.” Event organisers tend to pay for flights and hotels for top competitors and there is prize money for those that win. Some crews or individuals now agree to split the money with fellow competitors who are part of their extended families, so that everyone can earn a living or get by. This can take the edge off the competitive spirit of their dancing as well, which in turn can result in their dance performance improving. Clothing companies such as Nike or Adidas also often sponsor b-boys and b-girls at this level. Although most dancers are quite tight-lipped about their sponsorships, a few explained to me that it is important that both parties get something out of the deal. In fact, enough of the respondents commented about this topic in such the same jargon, that I imagined it was part of the corporate-speak they were given in meetings with sponsors.

Those dancers who were most successful as competitors in breaking battles, and who built an international, or at least local reputation, can now find work as judges for competitions. This is a growing field, as larger and larger international competitions happen throughout the world and require experienced and respected judges. As an offshoot of this, some judges and event organisers are now collaborating to make judging systems that are fair and clear for competitors. Judges tend to live at home, wherever that is, and to fly out for competitions in various countries.

On the other hand, dancers who wish to move into the entertainment

industry tend to move to major centres, such as Los Angeles or London, to have careers in the field. They work in music videos, perform at live corporate events (where the money is) and also supplement their income by dancing at private functions such as birthday parties for wealthy children. These dancers move beyond the logic of breaking worlds to interact with dancers, producers and music artists who sometimes require different sorts of performances.

Hip hop theatre remains at the edges of the art world. This line of work is regarded as less 'commercial' than the entertainment industry and it is meant to be taken more seriously. Again, this is an emerging field that began quite quietly in the early 1990s. This avenue of work became hugely popular in France and is growing right now in the UK with the development of Breakin' Convention, the largest hip hop theatre festival in the world, and one that is now developing outshoots in various countries. Dancers that headline this tour tend to train in their own city and then migrate for the final rehearsals, performances and tours. Alongside these dancers, there are now DJs, tour managers, lighting technicians, etc. that turn the breaking crew into a 'cast' and crew. I discuss hip hop theatre's development as an emerging field in more depth in Chapter 8.

Many dancers also produce music for dancing. This was more common in the late 1980s when the link between various aspects of hip hop culture was strongest, but it is still common. In the early days, b-boys and b-girls were encouraged to take up music as a way to make money when the record industry was still a viable career path for performers. Many dancers learn to play instruments as well, which is seen by them as a similar type of activity to dancing, in keeping with the entertainment industry profession. Recently, funk



bands have emerged that tour internationally and cover classic breaking songs that breakers love to dance to. One of these bands is now getting work playing live at after-parties at international breaking competitions around the world.

Almost every city where there are breakers has a few event organisers who began as amateur b-boys or b-girls. This is an avenue that is typically explored by dancers who were never top competitors, and who thus tended to fulfil other important functions in the culture. Event organisers who were dancers first tend to be more popular with local dancers, because they are trusted within the scene, and they know what dancers need at events: good music for dancing, the right kind of floor and proper understanding of how the dance operates, such as how battles are judged, how long they run for ideally, etc. Having said that, many b-boys who want to throw an event end up being less successful, not realising the skills necessary to be a good event organiser, beyond scene connections and know-how. A few local b-boys who threw events, exploiting their contacts to do so, were the public front while their girlfriends were actually running the event behind the scenes.

Due to the physical requirements of the dance, other typical career paths that b-boys and b-girls have explored include physiotherapy, massage therapy, personal training or other aspects of the fitness industry. These are occupations pursued generally by dancers who want to maintain their dance practice for fun and fitness and do not necessarily want to advance their dance practice into a dance career. On the other hand, a few serious dancers also work in the fitness industry and use this as a potential 'back-up' field of employment, while simultaneously striving to be top competitors. I have also met a few doctors

(both medical and academic) who are also b-boys and former b-girls.

This brings me to the final career path mentioned which is teaching, and this is now beginning to take place in Higher Education, with Popmaster Fabel, for example, hired on the teaching staff at NYU<sup>5</sup>. Some b-boys and b-girls have also opened hip hop or street dance studios, where they, and people they know, teach various styles such as breaking, popping, locking, house and 'street' or 'hip hop' at various levels, usually referred to as 'beginner', 'intermediate', 'advanced' and open practice. Teaching the dance is a common practice for ageing dancers, although most begin this quite early on in their dance training. The reason is that much of the training of the dance, especially initially in the history of the dance, was peer-to-peer, and dancers often train up their friends so that they have people to dance with.

With this general overview of possible professions, what is touched on lightly is that there are specific centres in the world that act as dance 'hubs', to which dancers tend to travel or to visit for work in the now international scene. The obvious choice of destination would seem to be New York City, and dancers continue to emphasise the importance of making pilgrimages to the birthplace of the dance. But as the dance has become an international phenomenon, the centres for making money have shifted to places like L.A., Paris, London and South Korea.

#### The Significance of Lyrics in Laying Down the 'Foundation'

As ageing dancers in hip hop culture transition roles in this variety of

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<sup>5</sup> New York University, New York, USA.

ways, becoming DJs, coaches, mentors, judges, or musicians, they resemble cultural artefacts themselves, and preserve dance styles through their actions. A transformation of roles also changes the meaning of the scene: from rebellious youth culture to multigenerational tradition. Ageing dancers take on new positions in b-boy worlds that emphasise their increasing knowledge, even as their bodies begin to experience more aches and pains. These new roles have changed the international scene and filled out the infrastructures that support the dance style in dynamic ways (representing an influx in entrepreneurial spirit in both dance and music production).

With these scene mutations, something strange has occurred in breaking scenes worldwide: the musical tastes of the group have resisted ageing. Instead, musical tracks from the 1970s and early 1980s remain perpetually present and popular. Also, the longer that ageing dancers dig into the popular music practices of their youth, *the more significant the lyrics become to their musical understanding*. This is unusual for a cultural practice of dancing to break beats.

I will suggest, as a premise for the arguments of this section, that musical tastes transform with dance practice, and that this transformation influences the directions of an ageing music and dance culture: namely international breaking culture. Alongside the transformations in musical taste (and here even preferred taste for the same songs over time is a form of change), dancers must also alter their dance practice to adjust to the limitations of the ageing body, as touched on in the previous chapter. The body does not limit the contributions of dancers to the culture as long as their movements are articulations of the dance. The meaning they put into it, often through the use of analogies, offers new and

fresh perspectives on the dance as a living movement.

In interviews I did with older dancers, who are now in their forties, they acknowledged that when they first began breaking, their practice was centred around the break beat (the percussive break in a song where parts of the rhythm sections, or less frequently, the horn section, “go off”). B-boys would match this moment in the music by ‘going off’ themselves, and this is how breaking emerged as a practice originally. As the story goes, the DJs began to extend the breaks, and the b-boys would stay down on the ground longer doing more moves.

However as dancers got older, they started to think about the meaning of the songs differently and they did this by making sense of the lyrics, and in fact, truly listening to the words of the songs they were dancing to. Dancers also began to put the meanings of their favourite songs into a historical and cultural context.

One example is, *It's Just Begun* by The Jimmy Castor Bunch. The lyrics are: “day or night, black or white, dance or sing, you gotta do your thing. Peace will come, this world will rest, once we have togetherness.” This is a song from 1972, in the midst of the Black Power Movement and at a time not only of a struggle for equal rights (the civil rights movement reached its climax in 1968), but also of an extended effort towards consistency in education. The ambitions of some New York City b-boys to provide a coherent, technical language for the foundational moves has involved the foundational songs, which have grown in meaning for this dance over time.

This whole process takes on new significance and meaning as young people grow into adults and become teachers and role models themselves for younger dancers. *It is significant that the majority of the b-girls and b-boys become teachers of beginner b-boys and b-girls.* The music here 'is the key' to cultural memory. Older dancers want to remember, not only the pleasures of youth but also the power of using the training of the body and mind together to raise the confidence of marginalised young people.

What I have been discussing in this section is that the type of embodied learning that dancing provides is revealed through an ageing youth culture that has become a multigenerational, international movement. In the 1990s, dancers were radical about their aesthetics and practices: the dance was not only a trend, but also a significant international cultural movement that notably educated youth about equality, in just the same ways as are found in the lyrics of *It's Just Begun*. Those b-boys and b-girls who shared the dance internationally, opening up their crew and dance knowledge to extended families of dancers from other places, races and genders contributed the most to the internationalising tendencies of the hip hop aesthetic that nurtured and sustained the dance form.

#### Building an Era-based Aesthetic

Dyzee mentioned in our interviews how other b-boys from Canada had also built international reputations, but are often forgotten. For example, he had referenced Megus from the Boogie Brats and Gizmo from Bag of Trix. In the case of Gizmo he suggested that:

He [Gizmo] totally disappeared and started working right [away] so people that were around at that time when Bag of Trix was still killing it in '99 would have seen Gizmo and been like Gizmo is amazing. But after, he becomes a myth because he totally disappears from the scene. In the beginning it was all underground tapes but after the underground tape movement it became like event tapes: Freestyle Session, B-boy Summit, those were the master tapes and Pro Am. Those things are cool, it wasn't no longer those handheld video camera tapes. So that's why people started going to [big events to] make their names, that's why Freestyle Session was so big. You had to go there because you knew that if you got on the tape, you'd be like, that was every breaker's dream back then. Until the Internet came and totally wiped things out. Man, I think I was the first person to really blow up on the Internet and go across the world. Some people say that I actually started the Asian pride movement in breaking. This Asian guy is winning all these battles, because they didn't see Gizmo. I think that's why he's been forgotten, not enough people have seen him. Same with Megus, people kind of knew him but he never blew up on Internet scene, so forgotten.

There are several issues here to unpack. First of all, in Dyzee's analysis of the situation it is clear that those who do not continue to dance, getting work in other fields besides the b-boy scene, and who, likewise, are not actively refreshing their reputation, tend either to be forgotten or to acquire legendary status as a 'myth.' Also, Dyzee is aware that developments in the presentation of the dance, from videotapes through to the Internet, are key to building a reputation, and that a certain opportunity was not there for older b-boys whose footage and performances preceded the internet. People would travel to events not only to be seen and to battle, but also to be seen on tape so that they could build their reputation that way. (I will return to this point later in the chapter about online representation.) Thirdly, he mentions the significance of ethnicity in the building of a reputation. There were other key Asian dancers who preceded Dyzee's career, such as Bionic Man of Rockforce crew, for popping.

Later, both Dyzee and Gizmo would explain how they were well received in various Asian countries and by people from various Asian cultural or ethnic backgrounds worldwide, who related to them ethnically.

One of the ways that Dyzee built his reputation was through the complexity and difficulty of his moves, alongside his originality. He suggested that the emphasis on originality was a dimension of his local scene:

Our philosophy is, it's the Toronto thing, you have to be original and you should have your own style. Even though right now we aren't pushing that as hard right now. But at the same time, whatever you want to do to best express you. You don't have to be original just for the sake of being original. Toronto is too closed minded that you have to be something totally original, totally different. But when the foundation movement came along, everyone decided ok, well I'm just going to do foundations because that way it's universal.

Here originality is described as part of the local scene's values, and 'foundations' as central to the international scene. Dyzee articulated that foundations are part of the New York style and scene, and that it is about, "having confidence, using techniques of hitting beats, footwork and finesse. That would be the New York foundation."

Following along from this concept of a New York foundation, another b-boy from Ontario, gave some comments on the internationalisation of breaking aesthetics. He explained:

Since I started studying architecture, I've started comparing it to Breaking. In architecture there was a movement just before modernity or the "international style" that was very expressive or organic. To compare this movement to breaking is to say that it would be like Style Elements from LA. These architects were labelled as expressionists and soon saw their demise to an international form called modernity. Now modernity referred the seeking out of the dominant forms, and creating them based off of function. Function, would then reflect style, and so on. Why

this is similar to Breaking is because if you look at the dance today you can see this international style. It's as if everyone collectively feels that "Zulu Kings" have the dominant style, and that the breaks that everyone rocked in the early days in New York are the only function. Inevitably however, architects from this modernist epoch, soon fell, and if you look to most architectural theorems nowadays, they are often labelled as post-modern-rejecting the doctrine of one international style. What I think breaking will have, and what I represent, is a Post-New York- Post Zulu Kings flow. Although I respect their style, influence and history of moves, I feel that evolution is necessary, and static is an illusion.

Some of the navigations and cultivation of meaning in which Lance is invested have to do with the sentiments of a particular era of dancers, most of them now in their early thirties. This generation came after the 1980s explosion, and like Remind, mentioned earlier in this chapter, they have come to represent a different aesthetic. This era of dancers that represented in the 1990s, who used to be referred to as the 'new school' b-boy/b-girl movement, was notable for several reasons. The new school was marked by an emphasis on an individualism and 'originality' that, although also characteristic of earlier dancers, became central to the meaning of the dance. This proved to be a mark of contestation between those from the early 1980s, who enjoyed the aspects of lineage, tradition and heritage that also existed in the 1990s. For example, when b-boys and b-girls from the West Coast began to define themselves as a 'new school' that was moving the dance into a contemporary era of new musical developments, older b-boys were quick to point out the influence and significance of crews in Japan and Europe, who were carrying on the traditions of the dance in a way focused more on understanding the original aesthetic than on changing the aesthetic. As I argue throughout this work, the more outsiders



attempt to preserve the original foundation, the more they change both the meaning and the style of the dance.

However, the focus of North American dancers in the 1990s was about trying to impress peers by showing dancers in one's own crew new moves and styles. The elements of surprise and spontaneity were key to the stylistic emphasis of this period. As one b-boy who danced in Toronto in the 1990s explained, dancers used to train by themselves 'in the lab' at home before coming out to let other people see them. However, when he travelled to Europe, he noticed that the b-boys there practiced differently, all sharing space at a practice but not cyphering. Rather they would often be training in an individual corner on their own. This was a difference he remembers from the 1990s. Other changes in the culture were also occurring, or at least being recognised as diversities in cross-cultural exchanges.

The centrality of a concern with judgement, of dancers *by* dancers, was beginning to develop in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was related to the position of breaking as a dance trend, with fleeting qualities. By this time, dancers not only realised that the form of breaking itself could die out, but also that the trends within the dance style were constantly changing. For example, dancers tended to be either associated with 'power' or 'style' moves and began to define their identity along this axis. The scene itself would lean towards an appreciation of and emphasis on one aspect of performance or the other. Similarly, the axis of 'old school' and 'new school' moves was quickly absorbed into a new debate surrounding the notion of an international aesthetic. Those from the 1990s era placed an emphasis on 'originality' and expression of a self,

marked by individualism. This value has been looming in the background during the latest phase of the last few years, focused on a return to 'foundations,' and waiting to be picked up again as the opposite of a foundational style. For example, Remind explained:

How are these cats that just started breaking for like four years trying to look like their from ... they're trying to be old school, but you're not old school ... (They're learning how to break ... and then eventually it turns into their own expression.)

... When I see cats do that I'm like, 'oh they're learning how to break' ... Oh, this guy's good but some people think they can do the basics hella fast ... and think they can get away with that. To me? Hell no. I was breaking like that in '84 and '85 when I was a kid. I didn't want to go back and dance like how I was then, I was trying to move on to new dances ...so the people that are doing that, you're learning how to break. This thing extends way farther than that. ... You can't capture hip hop and hold it hostage ...

And then now, guess what? this shit is coming back in. You can only look original so many times ... so that transition ... watch ... you're going to see their game change up ... happens every three years...

I remember, I can speak for most of us, that we wanted to be original ... It was about doing something that your friends hadn't seen that are always around you. Doing something different that they're not doing ... You find *yourself*, that's what it's about self expression. Of course you're picking up inspiration from each person in that cypher but our whole main thing was to be original ...

The stories behind each one of us, it's deep. It's got history ... content ... spirits ... many, many, many spirits that allowed me to be here ... so that's what I bring, and that's what an individual will bring to the cypher, that history of self ... They're seeing the look on my face, the way my body is built, the way that I'm hitting or the way that I'm thinking ... That's what makes an individual powerful ... our body is an instrument so we're playing with it ... it's good to learn traditional and practice it but go beyond it ...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "The Crumbs Chronicles (Webisode 1) 6/7" by Donnie Counts  
<<http://vimeo.com/7033519>> [Accessed December 18, 2010]

The notion that b-boys or b-girls be original absolutely relies on an audience that knows what other moves have been done and how. In other words, the response to the dance requires that the judging spectator is indeed another dancer, a peer. This resulted in events that were organised for b-boys/b-girls, by b-boys/b-girls, with boys and b-girls as the audience. This period of the culture was thus deemed 'underground.' This emphasis on originality required that inward looking model. For example, Dyzee explained that during his previous involvement as an event organiser, the scene became organised around peer judgement:

When did I start throwing events? I started throwing events in 1999 called Back to the Underground, that was the name of the first jam. It was spelled correctly too. I don't know where Back 2 Da Underground came from for the next jam. But the original one was called Back to the underground, that's because I knew it was going to be a really ghetto jam, right? Because I was putting (an event) together for the first time, I said, hey I wanna make it underground because of all the underground kids, you know. I've always wanted to break around breakers because I felt that I wasn't the type of breaker that had moves that are showy but I felt that a lot of b-boys in Toronto they create moves that only, perhaps only other b-boys or breakers would look at and be able to understand so I always wanted to throw a jam that was strictly just for the breakers where breakers could all dance and battle each other and be judged by other breakers.<sup>7</sup>

This emphasis is a move away from audiences judging dancers on their spectacular qualities, towards b-boys judging each other on the perhaps more subtle nuances, originality, and innovation that are only recognisable to those well-versed in the developments of the dance. This is also perhaps a historical observation to situate at a particular time, when b-boys still felt, locally, that

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<sup>7</sup>August 8, 2007, interview that took place in car ride between Toronto and Montreal, Canada with other crew members present.

they could recognise who had originated moves and developed them, before the Internet revolution. Back To The Underground, then Back 2 da Underground, was organised by Dyzee with the support of his family, who owned the community centre where the event would happen, alongside his crew member 'partner,' who handled the business and advertising.

The next era, which I discuss briefly, involved a return to the 'foundations' of the dance, made possible by the international infrastructure that enabled New York City b-boys to fly around the world teaching. It was also a period devoted to 'top' performances of a different kind.

#### Biting

The issue of ownership has come up in two interesting ways, especially in relation to the 1990s interest in originality. On the one hand, dancers regulate issues of originality through the development of rules around 'biting' (which is taking someone else's moves or ideas) and discussions about issues of originality and who owns different moves. There is a large degree of emphasis placed on 'flipping it' (which is making moves your own) because of the centrality of competition in determining the status and earnings of dancers.

On the other hand, dancers are concerned with corporate exploitation and the use of dance and dancers by commercial enterprises of various kinds – advertising agencies, film and TV people, theatre companies, etc. because people's work is used without proper credit or reward (especially via music videos). One area where dancers have received more sufficient payments and

credit is through their involvement in video game motion capture: for the game, *B-boy Playstation* for example.

Both of these issues have become a problem because of the difficulties dancers have of protecting their rights, or even defining what those rights are as a matter of law, and as a matter of morality. Whereas the history of the music concept of work/author developed in symbiosis with copyright law (and publisher interests), this did not happen for dance.

There are three areas to consider then in how ownership has been defined in dance. First, in the art world the notion of the work and author are transposed onto the choreography and choreographer (Van Camp 1994), and this has depended on notational conventions, photography and thinking of dance as a high art. In this way, the billing of the choreographer has a status like that of the composer. This is problematic for vernacular dance (as for vernacular music) when there is not the same separation of dance/dancer or work/body.

Secondly, popular dance instruction books are so subordinated to printed matter copyright that the instruction seems to direct boys and girls to own the dance that they learn. Thirdly, folk dance and certain kinds of heritage are protected under UNESCO<sup>8</sup> guidelines as folklore. The International Dance Council (CID) is UNESCO's official umbrella organisation for all forms of dance in all countries of the world.

In the daily lives of dancers, originality is an issue. For example, Dyzee was influenced by the focus on originality developed by the crew Bag of Trix.

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<sup>8</sup> UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Some more details of their crew reveal their thinking about 'biting.' Gizmo met Benzo, Daze, Caso and Magic who were all doing the '95 Southstyle in the early 1990s. He battled Benzo and Caso and Daze, and then got into the crew, Bag of Trix. There were about fifteen of them and they used to hang out, practice, and go to parties. They were focused on the art of dancing and they each had their own style of breaking. They had a main rule in their crew that no biting was allowed. A lot of crews learn each other's moves but with them no biting was allowed. Everyone danced. Gizmo explained that,

Biting is when you take a certain move from another dancer and claim it for your own. You take it straight. But what Bag of Trix thinks is that you need to take a move and flip it or give recognition to the person you took it from. It only takes a minute to take it but it takes a long time for people to come up with moves. With execution it's the same you have to flip it for example doing an elbow drop to a lotus position. You've got to flip the move and change the position in your retaliating move.

In Toronto, Gizmo's take on the international scene now reveals his approach to creativity. He told me that,

Our attitude was no biting allowed. It's accepted now and that is killing b-boy culture. So many moves out there you'll look like everyone else and need a new sequence, not about the creativity. Now it's about execution and that's holding the culture down.

Gizmo follows this by explaining that his crew had "everything" not just dancers but also emcees, graffiti writers and DJs. This is significant to his understanding of what constitutes creativity in cultural practices; what can only be described as a bigger picture. Another b-boy who grew up near Toronto added that dancers are not just biting moves now. They are also taking whole feelings, characters and looks of other dancers as their own. Basically, *identities* are being copied as they relate to dance.

A dancer in New York<sup>9</sup> explained that when outsiders try to film them, they line up in front of the person so that they cannot take pictures or shoot videos of the dancers. They use their own bodies to block and protect other dancers in public space, who are simply trying to earn a living on the street without being exploited.

This has repercussions for the development of extended families. For example, a b-boy from Scotland, in his thirties now, explained that when he went on a pilgrimage to New York City, to learn more about the history, he became frustrated when b-boys there would not let him videotape their moves. He explained that he had wanted to get some more foundations and to learn, but that they were unwilling to share. Instead he was treated as an outsider to the culture.

#### Pilgrimage and Mediation

Gizmo, like Dyzee after him, also went to New York. In 1994, he met many of the key international figures there. He danced for them and was quickly put down with Rocksteady crew and went to Zulu Nation Anniversary in 1994 and Rocksteady Anniversary in New York in 1995. Dancers in Japan saw a tape, of a performance he had given at the Zulu Nation Anniversary. So the next year, when he was at the Rocksteady Anniversary, he met a lot of Japanese breakers who recognised him from the video they had seen. In a mutual, creative exchange, Gizmo invited them to Toronto and was quickly invited to Japan to

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<sup>9</sup> I interviewed him as an enthusiast, student researcher in 2004 for an undergraduate thesis project. He let me videotape the interview because it was for a school project!

present shows and workshops. There he remembers that they would practice in train stations and malls. On each floor of the mall, kids would be practicing a different style like house, popping, etc.

He recalls that at this time the Rocksteady crew had different chapters. They had a Toronto chapter. The president would organise a team of dancers to perform in Switzerland, Italy, etc. and they would do rehearsals and fly out. He would give newer b-boys shows, and acted as an agent and manager. Gizmo took time off school for these travels, but when he returned, he picked up his studies again and for a time, became a myth, or forgotten, unsung b-boy legend of the past.

The Work of Art, Perspiration not Concept<sup>10</sup>

“Inspiration is, in reality, perspiration.”

Julian Young (1992, 69) in reference to Nietzsche’s (1995) work, *Human, All too Human*.

Professional engagements enable the physical work of breaking. Dancers have the time necessary to practice their art under constraints that have the potential to improve aspects of their overall performances. Those who perform in the theatre tend to train for two to three hours a day and then perform. This dedication enhances performances, as does the control necessary to face the

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<sup>10</sup> Lydia Goehr (1989, 1992) demonstrates the historical trajectory of the ‘work-concept,’ where works of art were treated as ideal types that needed to be contemplated quietly in museums or concert halls. The work was a ‘concept’ beyond the actual, live performance. For example, the notated score represented the concept of the composer, which was the ‘work,’ and the performance is merely a secondary actualisation. In this chapter, I am discussing the actual physical and mental work that goes into the creation of dance. So, not the work-concept, but the work of dance practice.



audience when they stick a freeze. Those who compete in the top international competitions train up to six hours a day in preparation for the event. This management of time makes obvious the value of rest in the preparation of a work, an area rarely considered in the work of dance. Most models of the work of art worlds do not account for the necessary periods of rest, both in recovering the body, healing injuries and restoring the mind. This puts things in perspective, minimises the investment of what is at stake, and thus increases dancers' abilities.

Many of the dancers who win international competitions consistently, present or at least approach the work of dance in a different way to their peers. Most of them discussed their approach to creating a 'set' (a sequence of movements that constitutes a whole turn in the circle) that was more meticulous than others, like those described from previous eras when dancers often allowed for more improvisation in their dance technique. The top performers had additional work practices that included planning and archiving, alongside extended durations of time involved in the putting together of sequences of moves. Many of these competitors are not considered the best dancers in the scene, yet they will consistently beat performers who are considered to be better dancers in competition. Those dancers, who sometimes excel at 'cyphers', rather than at competitions, certainly seemed to have different tendencies in their practice, involving less deliberate practice and, more often, continuous performances for their peers in the practice session. However, here are some of the trademark behaviours I discovered that are all evident in the case study provided by Dyzee through his master class workshop.

He discussed explicitly there how he had developed his art. His approach is influential on subsequent generations of dancers.

First, Dyzee did his 'homework.' This included researching the history of New York City foundations, through trips to New York and discussions with b-boys from that city. Like others who have made the pilgrimage to New York to understand the meaning and origins of this style, Dyzee learned to treat narratives and recollections of the past with some careful scrutiny. He crosschecked stories, thinking about the investment the person involved in telling the story might have had, and he asked questions for further clarification. Then, Dyzee organised what he had learned so far into codified meanings that he could share with students. In his class, he broke down the cultural influences of different neighbourhoods in New York City and the overall sense of style and meaning he had understood from his travels. For example, he described how New York City is about an attitude of confidence and sharp poses organised by rockin' out to the music.

When Dyzee began to address his ideas about his own practice, he was quick to introduce the concept of art. He described how art starts out with a concept. He likes to think of his sets as an album; in other words, he is in the lab creating a bunch of new ideas and then he brings his work out like a concept album. Following from this, he described to the class how a masterpiece takes time. He archives all of his moves and thinks about how to connect moves, and if he does not find the right fit, he does not bring the move out. Also, he thinks about his dance in terms of mathematics, with principles of three in movement. For Dyzee, the principle of three is a creative rule he likes to use when

constructing a 'set.' A 'set' is a sequence of movements that are rehearsed in advance of a battle and executed as close to as planned as possible. In the principle of three, a movement idea is repeated in three different variations, or different tempos or directions. This repetition has to do with timing, flow and the build up and suspension required to 'wow' the audience. Each of his masterpieces has an intro, main body and finishing move and this resembles the New York foundations of entry, footwork and freezes. Finally, Dyzee described to the class his view on breaking when he told them, "You're the artist: don't let others tell you how to express yourself!"

This assertion of artistry is here used to displace the authority of others and to ascertain, from the developing practitioner, a sense of confidence in their own voice. In other words, becoming an 'artist' in this context is linked to a rejection of tradition or group processes when developing movement ideas.

#### Transnational Generosity and Local Strife

One older b-girl, from Montreal, Canada, mentioned that she does not 'get any love' in her local scene, but when she goes to new places and countries other b-boys and b-girls are generous and hospitable. After she had won a major international competition when returning home to her local scene, where she had already mentioned not feeling supported, she was more nervous to dance. She felt that people were just waiting for her to make mistakes so they could say that she is not that *good*.

In the UK, there were several examples of b-girls (all white in ethnicity) in various cities who tended to practise on their own and not to train or practise

with others in a crew. For a social dance, built on crew formations, this is quite noticeable. It appears that serious b-girl contenders remain rather isolated and unsupported where their partner is not a b-boy participating in the scene. In those cases, b-girls are often accepted as their partner's other half.

Instead, b-girls would have loose affiliations with dancers in other places, who would support them briefly on visits and at events, but they would not receive a lot of support locally. When I mentioned this, in passing, in conversation with some well-known b-boys on tour, one of the American b-boys, who has won more international competitions than anyone else, mentioned that he always trained by himself and does not even really practice with anyone else. He also mentioned later on that at his high school, growing up, he was the only one that listened to hip hop music. Like the top performing b-girls, he also had a practice that was rather independent and a musical appreciation that was not shared with others. These cases are interesting to consider, side by side, when developing an analysis of 'global generosity and local strife': the way that dancers support each other in the diaspora of breaking cultural migrations, travel and tourism but not at home in their local scene. Independent practices and practicalities for top performers may exist at what could be deemed the 'local' level. In other words, to achieve status as a top performer with an international aesthetic one is often alienated or isolated in one's home base.

## Conclusion

Locality is central to how styles and moves are organised, understood

and transported into the present teaching about the dance. But it is those organisations of individuals into local and international alliances that create the lineages through which the history can be read. In other words, understanding breaking aesthetics is less about homologies between style and place than it is about the circulation of aesthetics in complex international networks. The international aesthetic is the result of the processes of ageing and geographical expansion of the culture.

There is a tendency in histories of art to discuss the great figures. This style of historicisation is reproduced in the attempts by breakers to legitimise their art. The great figures of breaking are those who have contributed a move, a style or a value to the international culture. As one b-boy explained if people copy what you do then you have made an impact on the scene. So, although copying the moves of others is seen to be unethical, b-boys and b-girls also build their reputations through being internationally influential, which has involved being copied to a degree.

From the quotation that began this chapter, it is clear that many dancers see themselves as contributors to a *culture*. They also liken their practice to an art form. These values are crucial to considerations of the political economy of the style – the work of dance – and raise important questions about a practice that is also organised around productions that are rarely autonomous. Although crews may form without financial incentive, they are often split up when the commercial or capitalistic enterprise of becoming professional dancers is introduced into the relationship.

The reasons that dancers have for dancing change over time, and so do

their musical tastes. The analysis of these changes must be considered through two lenses that rather complicate the relations. First, the 'era' within which a b-boy or b-girl begins their practice is critical for the values and meanings that they link to their particular style, and this is as central to their understanding of style as their locality. Second, the trends within the dance culture, as an *imaginary* autonomous art form, must be considered. Although the dancers never claim, or position themselves, as taking part in an autonomous art form, they imagine and construct their discourses around values that are not dependent on income or commerce. This is one of the unique characteristics of breaking: the work of the dance involves a desire to earn money, yet the desire to earn recognition ('props') from one's peers dictates the development of particular styles within the practice, adhering to trends in the *culture*.

This chapter has set up some of the local and era-specific values involved in breaking, in a scene that developed outside of New York City. The work of dance as understood by participants has also been discussed, as well as the ways in which the reputations of individual b-boys and b-girls began to develop outside of their local crews, as supported by a growing infrastructure provided by ageing dancers. In the next chapter, I build on the theme of an 'international aesthetic' by demonstrating some of the ways that the notion of *one* 'foundation' has been challenged and respected in the space of the classroom.



### **Section III: Dance as a Performance of Musical Tastes**





## Chapter 7: Master Classes

“Each One Teach One, so here I come to the drum.”

Grand Puba, “Drop the Bomb”<sup>1</sup>

Master classes are a relatively new phenomenon in breaking culture. B-boys and b-girls who are invited to perform shows, judge battles and compete, in various countries, are often also asked to deliver a class and share some of their knowledge, insights and techniques. Their reputation as a b-boy or b-girl is the draw for the local dancers who sign up to learn more.

Before master classes and their conventions and various contexts are described in more detail, some distinctions need to be laid out. Borrowing from the literature on music education, there are several concepts that help to organise what I observed in my field research. First, although some environments are thought of as ‘formal’ and others as ‘informal,’ in actuality both categories of activity are evident in any learning situation, and they can be seen as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy (Folkestad 2006). Following from this, it becomes clear that environments that rely more heavily on orality are not necessarily less formal. In fact many cultural practices that are stereotyped as informal learning contexts are actually highly formalised (Sæther 2003). Finally, in popular cultural practices, performances in public are actually central to the learning process (Folkestad 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Brand Nubian (1990)

My contribution to this field of music education, in its application to (street) dance education, is to introduce in this chapter some new questions: what is the difference between teaching and coaching? And, what role does music play in learning to break? In asking these, I draw attention to the significance of music in cross-cultural exchanges, such as the master class environment, and demonstrate how the judgements involved in this popular cultural practice are made explicit in an educational arena. These judgements include strategies for the acquisition and performance of musical tastes and dance meanings.

The breaking practices and learning described in the previous chapters demonstrate that breaking has highly formalised learning environments as well as many 'informal' learning environments. The initial predominance of informal learning strategies, in the history of the dance, was often necessarily the case because of the nature of the outsider cultures that picked up the practice through mediated sources, such as films, before the establishment of international networks and the rise of the Internet. However, as the last chapter has described, international networks have provided a more structured teaching field, with clearly demarcated authority and debate. This field took time to develop. The first b-boys and b-girls from New York City often learned through peer-to-peer mentorship since the form was just developing at that time. However, the increasing longevity of b-boys and b-girls' careers, into their twenties and thirties, allowed for a formalisation to develop gradually.

When b-boys began to go on tour in the 1980s and 1990s, they would often teach other b-boys informally in the cities they visited. This was more of a

sharing experience between fellow breakers, and it explains some of the reluctance of other b-boys or b-girls to partake in the formal teaching represented by the newer development of master class workshops<sup>2</sup>. Many b-boys and b-girls want to distinguish themselves from 'studio' dancers, and are reluctant to learn from others in this way because that is not how they learned initially. Local, amateur b-boys and b-girls learned to treat breaking as a 'free' and 'unlearned' activity, involving peer-to-peer experimentation at times. Therefore, sometimes they do not perceive the dance as a style that should cost money or be paid for.

In what follows, I present observations from master class workshops. These observations are general in nature and cover the foundational techniques, approaches and values that are conveyed in dance workshops. One of the major distinctions between local classes, master classes and 'pioneer' workshops, is that those who teach at the local level often themselves take master classes or workshops, to improve their own skill set, as dancers and as teachers. The development of workshops in an organised fashion is a recent development in breaking culture.

The convention is usually that even those who originally begin to learn the dance in a classroom eventually transition into participating more in training sessions and informal learning amongst peers and crew members.

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on several of my observations during field research. In one instance, a b-girl taking a master class in London, England (2007) spoke quite loudly about how she would not normally take a street dance class as she did not believe in learning this way. In another instance, b-boys at an event in Liverpool at which I performed did not attend the classes but opted instead to train together in a room set aside, rather than being taught formally.

However, the development of more restrictions and conditions for the teaching of dance in schools has accounted (in the UK at least) for the acceptability of local dance teachers taking these classes, with the intention of passing on what they have learned from out of town dancers to the students they have locally.

Most of the b-boys and b-girls in their late twenties and early thirties in Edinburgh, Scotland, for example, originally learned in a classroom from older b-boys in their scene. Some of the older b-boys would come to be regarded by this generation as their 'father' figure or mentor. Eventually they themselves would become teachers of classes, while also training on their own, with their crew and with other local dancers.

Breaking is a dance style and technique, like many other dances and musics, that requires individual practice and development, alongside concerted efforts and practice outside of class. Eventually this multi-sited practice replaces the classroom. It is generally accepted that one can only learn so much in a classroom and that other aspects of the dance require independent development.

Training, typically and ideally, involves three or four-hour blocks of time. Although the term 'training' was unfamiliar to me (for comparison in Canada people would say 'practice' or, 'do you want to go dancing?'), this sets up the conviction about what is going to happen. Moves that have a more gymnastic origin are often practised separately, at gymnastic facilities or on mats. Some b-boys and b-girls also learn these moves in the park. Additional training may also consist of personal practice ('in the lab') wherever someone can make a bit of space, at a community centre, dance studio or church hall, or at a park in nice

weather. Other aspects of b-boy/b-girl training consist of stretching exercises and weight training. Many dancers have also done some form of martial art that either contributes to or informs their breaking practice, as mentioned in earlier accounts. For example, martial arts can teach discipline and conditioning exercises that are then applied to breaking practice.

### Workshops and Coaching

Workshops have a fleeting quality. Dancers from out of town show up to teach for a few hours or for a week. Sometimes, as in the case of Storm's workshops in Erfurt, Germany, the students also travel to the city to take the workshops. Coaching on the other hand tends to require more structured daily and weekly training, alongside informal conversations and mentorship. The type of mentorship found in multigenerational crews resembles coaching, hence Kevin "DJ Renegade" Gopie, for example, is nicknamed "Coach" by the local b-boys in London, England (especially those in his crew, the Soul Mavericks).

When I asked Renegade, who coaches a b-boy crew as well as teaching the history of breaking as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of East London, to distinguish between teaching and coaching, he explained:

For me this is a question of context. And intention based on the context. Of course one hopes that every student you teach will get the full benefit and understanding of what you are trying to get across. Unfortunately, not everyone necessarily shares your passion. Coaching is taking extra care of those interested beyond the superficial. It's about guidance in deeper terms. Not just sharing the space, but providing challenges and tests along with feedback. About allowing your students to make mistakes whereby they discover their own expression. Assessing what their unique requirements may be in regards to learning a particular skillset. Not about teaching in a one size fits all

manner.

The “extra care” that Renegade speaks about resembles one of the key observations that sociologists have made about families. Giddens (2009) for example theorises that families are groups of people that stay together to raise children. This attitude towards care-giving is central to coaching.

What Renegade leaves out in his description is that coaching also involves a selection on his part. He teaches any beginners that want to learn, often for free, however he *invests* in coaching those who have a dedication to the dance. The distinction is a co-selection that occurs in coaching, whereby the participant chooses to learn from him, and he chooses to coach them, rather than just teach them. That extra care, in the b-boy/b-girl context, resembles a kinship system, which also involves peer-to-peer training and mentorship.

### Organisation of Workshops

Most workshop teachers teach (or certainly check) that b-boys and b-girls in the class have ‘foundations.’ This generally means styles and moves that developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s in New York City. There is a conventional structure to the way these foundations are taught and I have organised these categories below.

Even teachers from countries besides the USA will teach New York foundations, to the best of their ability, in master class workshops, before moving on to other aspects of the dance. Interestingly, the ‘oral’ history of the dance is woven into lessons and this is mainly historical facts and information that is deemed to be the ‘knowledge’ that is passed along. Teachers will often

make a point of referencing the fact that they learned something from someone. This is especially the case for foreign (to the United States) teachers. For example, a Finnish b-boy or b-girl leading a workshop will say, “Poe One describes this concept as such...” or, “I learned this from Mr. Wiggles.” (Both referenced b-boys are American dancers who are well known and who also teach workshops).

Before breaking down the moves, most teachers will explain other qualities or aspects of ‘foundations.’ For example, they may describe the particular attitude or confidence that shapes all the moves. Different teachers offer different advice about dealing with the psychology of building confidence. For example, one b-boy might think and suggest that fashion is a good way to build confidence (dressing the part). Another might talk about how breaking, as a ‘game’, is centred on confidence. If a dancer loses their confidence in a battle, and this shows visually in their facial or bodily expressions, then they have lost the battle regardless of the moves they have done. This belief is enforced in most breaking battles.

During my time in Scotland, one of the Edinburgh b-boys recalled starting out when there was only text on the Internet. He remembers trying to learn windmills from reading a description of how to do them. It was impossible. It is very hard for words to stand in for descriptors of moves. Now with accessible technologies, and sources such as YouTube, it is very easy to look up moves and get mediated tutorials on how to do them. However, teaching in person conveys more about the values and techniques of the dance



because it is more interactive. In what follows, I describe some of the basic move categories that b-boys are likely to teach:

**TOPROCK:** This is the dancing one does before getting down to the ground. It is the introduction; how you present yourself. You have to enter the circle with confidence and establish your style and character. It is important to get this right because it is how you first relate to others, make them feel your dancing, and establish your presence in the circle or battle. Each teacher will demonstrate variations of toprock: often basics repeated (that you will not see them do in public as repetitions) and sometimes stylistic preferences they have.

**GET DOWNS:** This is how a dancer moves from an upright position to the floor. This is also a key transitional move. Dancers need to have varied approaches to get down, and this is an opportunity to show finesse and understanding, and to defy expectations.

**DOWNROCK OR FOOTWORK:** This is how you move your legs around your body and arms. Your style and energy should match what you have put into your top rock. There are many variations of footwork that can be taught. One of the conventional footwork steps that is taught is called the '6-step.' This involves the student beginning in a crouched position. The steps are generally taught in the direction that the teacher prefers for their own footwork (which can be clockwise or counter-clockwise). This involves six steps around the torso of the body, where the arms are used for support and stay centred as the feet are propelled around the body using momentum gathered from the motion between steps. If you were then to take that move and perform it in a circle exactly as learned, someone may say that you are 'textbook.' That is a way of

saying that you have most likely learned, in a classroom, the right form but that you have not added your own technique, flavour or finesse. The '6-step' was a result of people trying to break down what they were doing when they were moving their legs and arms around their body. Variation, however, is the key. So, people will teach and name a variety of movements (3-step, 4-step, etc). All of the moves require the addition of individual style and flair, but that is generally not worked on during a workshop. Basically, dancers are given the various moulds and ideas to play with.

**FREEZES:** This is any position that is held and controlled. The freeze should always be shaped well (be aesthetically pleasing) so, for breaking, that might mean sharp angles, flexed feet, knees that are bent 90 degrees. Basic freezes that are taught in pioneer workshops might include the baby, and the chair.

**BACK ROCK:** This is a level lower, where your back is on the ground. It can involve exactly the same moves as down rock, only as the legs are going around the body, the torso is on the ground. Although backspins are different from back rock, teachers often teach them while students are getting familiar with movements on their back.

**AIR/POWER MOVES:** Although people will remind you that footwork or back rock also take a lot of 'power,' power moves have generally developed as a category, to describe moves such as: windmills, flares, swipes, 1990s, and halos. Windmills evolved out of the momentum of backspins with the spinning motion quite high up on the back. There were some intermediary moves where one would switch from spinning on the back to turning over and using arms as

pivots to continue the rotations. Legs tend to be straight and the best technique for windmills involves keeping the top of the head on the ground as rotations and turning over occur both for safety and to ensure the dancer is high enough up on their back to get the right momentum and technique. Flares involve keeping the legs off the ground and swinging them around the body while holding yourself up on your hands with arm strength. This move resembles the moves on the gymnastic pommel horse. Swipes are a move where the dancer twists at the torso, flipping from their hands to their legs in alteration. 1990s are a move where the dancer spins on one hand in an aerial move. For halos, the dancer balances on their head while spinning over in a similar fashion to the windmill (so rather than spinning on the back they spend time on their head). All of these moves have variations and there are power moves not mentioned here.

These moves generally involve acceleration, bursts of energy, flexibility, control and flow. Teachers may get into power moves or power move combinations (techniques for flowing from one move to another) if they see that the b-boys and b-girls in the room are advanced enough to develop their techniques. This is generally the place where they will give advice and tips that b-boys and b-girls can apply to moves that will take more than one session 'to get'. These are likely to be moves that they have already worked on. Because each individual may be working on a different move, this is often when the workshop may break out into a less structured, advice and tips session.

**GET UPS:** The phrases, 'getting up clean' or 'finishing' may be used to describe this set of moves. Basically they are ways to get out of freezes or other

moves cleanly and with confidence. One of the key factors of style is finessing even the final steps of the exit from the circle.

Teachers also sometimes focus on whatever is their specialty. If they have made up a move, and it is well established as their own move, then they will probably feel confident sharing it with others. Most of the time, teachers will stick with foundational moves and save their personal finesse and flair, but lately more people have started to share their signature moves. Part of the reason for this is that b-boys and b-girls taking the classes get frustrated when they continue to get workshops where teachers break down the foundations (which they feel they already know).

#### Alternatives

Not all teachers follow this structure or order of teaching. During the 1990s, Jacob “Kujo” Lyons (1999) published online an article about ‘FOUNDATIONS’ that contributed to his reputation as a maverick or individual with an opinion in the game. In other words, his opinions were controversial and also set him apart, as standing for an alternate position to the dominant one at the time:

Most b-boys, especially the older ones, consider foundation to be footwork, specifically six-step related footwork, and basic freezes. It's what most b-boys recommend to the inquisitive beginner to start off with. Mastery of foundation is considered the essence of a "true b-boy," and mastery of footwork techniques is what separates b-boys from other dancers. Or so they say. Most breakers I know personally, including myself, did NOT start off learning foundation footwork. The first move I learned was turtles, and many other people I know started with windmills or other basic power moves, or freezes, or a general understanding of rhythm. That's THEIR foundation, and I've

noticed that every breaker who starts off on the "wrong" foot looks TOTALLY different from any other breaker or dancer.

Here's my contention: If every would-be breaker started off learning the six-step and other accepted b-boy foundation movements, they would all look relatively similar. This can be either good or bad, depending on your point of view. It's good because we'll all look like "b-boys" as opposed to ballet dancers, but it might not be so good because we'll all look like we're doing the same thing. I don't mean we'll all be clones; we're all different people, with different qualities and capabilities, and we'll all interpret the same dance differently. There's nothing at all wrong with that. BUT...what if everybody started off learning something different? What if a would-be breaker never learned footwork, but had an amazing capacity for rhythm and freezes? Or power moves? Or something we haven't even conceived of yet? Would that person still be considered a b-boy?...

If the powers that be dictate that a b-boy is defined by constricted criteria (i.e. six-step), then I am not a b-boy. With or without "foundation," I am still KUJO, and always will be. And no one on this planet will ever be better than me at being Kujo. Peace.<sup>3</sup>

What is at stake in this quote is not only foundational and recognisable styles and movements but also questions of identity and belonging. To be oneself, as asserted in this excerpt, is to contribute an opinion and a stance to the agreed upon formulas of the dance. In 2007, Kujo would begin his class in L.A. (unlike other teachers) with some of his signature moves or combinations rather than with foundational toprock or downrock.

Kujo, although of the same era as Remind and Gizmo, regards foundations differently than they do. For example, Remind described foundations as coming first in a dancer's development, before originality.

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<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.thisbusinessofdanceandmusic.com/breakarticle.htm>> [Accessed August 6, 2010]

## Originality and Morality

Two further components, ‘signature moves’ and ‘flipping it’, both have to do with issues of morality in street styles. What moves one chooses to create, or alter are the foundation for one’s reputation, so dancers are invested in the moral codes of conduct that establish the rules of the game. The article from Kujo establishes another way that a b-boy can build his reputation, by thinking and coming up with a unique perspective. This perspective is also concerned, in some ways, with the same issues as concern more traditional approaches; not in terms of ‘foundations,’ but in terms of originality and individual expression.

**SIGNATURE MOVES:** These are moves that someone comes up with that they become known for, or the moves that are known to have been ‘created’ by them. A signature move that becomes a part of the arsenal of moves that is taught and known by other b-boys is a sign of success. This usually happens when the move is needed to learn more advanced moves that are ‘built’ on top of it. For example, Poe One is known for creating the ‘air chair’ or what he called ‘Cobra Attacking the Eagle.’<sup>4</sup>

**FLIP IT:** This is when you take a move that someone else does and change an aspect or quality of the movement, or freeze to make it your own; either unrecognisable as the other move, or clearly distinct from it although inspired by it. Students are taught the importance of flipping moves in classes.

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<sup>4</sup> A list of who created which b-boy moves is available here: <http://www.bboy.org/forums/moves-guides/109312-history-bboy-moves-2.html> [Accessed August 6, 2010]. As noted, the work of collecting this information is undertaken by well-known dancers who try to verify, to the best of their knowledge, the truth, through their own research questions and discussions.

## Case Study: Dyzee's Class in Montreal

In Montreal, 2007, Dyzee was conducting a master class workshop as well as entering a crew battle at an outdoor hip hop jam called *Under Pressure*. This also featured graffiti artists painting alleyways, emcees and prominent DJs such as Kool Herc. During Dyzee's workshop he laid out Toronto foundations historically. He described to the class various aspects of the dance, including the New York style origins, and then proceeded to explain how Toronto got ideas for moves, such as what he called "dynamic" footwork and "threading" style.

In the class, there were ten students with a range of ages and abilities and an even gender split. He started by asking them how they each got into breaking and wanting to know their names. From that he proceeded to talk about the attitude of confidence. From there, he went into the three styles out of New York: Brooklyn, Bronx and what he called 'Latino', and what each of these styles brought to the dance. He explained briefly how he got into dance. He showed some basic *toprock*, then built on this with the class to demonstrate each of those styles. Then he took those styles to the floor, and did the same with the Toronto exercises.

At the end of the class he explained how to think about putting moves together; how he sees the dance as art, and how it is like creating a 'masterpiece', so you have to wait sometimes to figure out how to get in or out of moves, putting things together to form a concept. It is different to just do a group of moves but not put them together. He said that archiving the dance is important for this reason, because you will put together some moves but have to wait until you figure out how to really put these moves together later. Then

you have to practice it a lot to make it second nature, so that when you go to battle it will come out naturally.

He talked about how he had talent before, but then he lost all that and nothing felt natural; he was mechanical, would watch footage of himself dancing and it did not look good. Then he had to think about everything again in terms of skill; where things came from. He had to do his own history, talk to people and figure out the New York history. He mentioned how he worked with Flex from Bag of Trix now, so they could talk about things. Now he has skill. He did not know what he was doing before, and the way he is explaining it now is not how he understood it at the time, rather, in the last few years he has begun to understand things more.

This sort of sharing of information takes both formal and informal channels. After the class, that had gone over an hour, the students stayed around to ask more questions. One student asked for Dyzee's autograph on his notes (Dyzee had handed out a paper that explained all the ideas and movements he had gone through in the class, so people could remember moves to work on them). After the workshop J-Rebel, Dyzee's crew member, spoke with one of the dancers who attended about coming up with one's own style, and admitted quite honestly that he was still working on developing his.

### Music in Classes

Music is significant to workshops, but its significance, like most other factors, depends on the historical context. The categories of dance being



discussed here extend at times beyond breaking to other hip hop and funk styles, such as popping, rocking, social dancing and locking.

Music is discussed in workshops. The complexity of this space is ripe not only for analysis, but also for the uncovering of the sorts of ambiguities highlighted by a multi-sited ethnography. Here opinions conflict with and cross each other on multiple levels that quickly transform yet again. This is a result of the instantaneous mediations that the participants of these dance styles experience in their daily lives. The unfolding of various subject positions and explanations of musical tastes in classes was, for the participants in my study, an opportunity for remarkable moments when their musical tastes were transformed through learning. Thus the classroom environment transforms people's musical selections, but this education relies on a moment that closely resembles the 'eureka' turn of events that any experimenter or scientist experiences when the worldview instantly changes, because of the special nature of musical experience.

For dancers, social groups tend to be centred on agreed musical tastes. As Ken Swift recently pointed out, "If you don't like the music it's going to be hard to do this dance."<sup>5</sup> This is complex, as the taste distinctions are also already multigenerational, and music means different things to different generations of dancers. What was 'new' music for early dancers is 'old' music to newer dancers. A dancer in his early twenties, Tony "Y-Not" DeNaro, already internationally renowned for his toprock skills, claims that the reason he can dance so well is because, unlike other dancers, he will go home at night and

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<sup>5</sup> Remarks from Breakin' Conventions workshop, Edinburgh, June 20, 2010.

listen to funk music from the 1970s<sup>6</sup>. French sociologist, Isabelle Kauffmann, recalled to me that during her research on 'la danse hip hop' (Shapiro and Kauffmann 2006) she was surprised at how old the music was that was being played by the teacher during a popping class<sup>7</sup>.

Knowing a song, or being familiar with the musical material of a song (i.e. the break beat) can be thought of from each of these perspectives. If the song is part of your musical tastes you are likely to be familiar with it, which will aid your musical competence and serve your musicality. Clearly, conditioning and training the body, alongside improvisation and creativity, are also significant factors not only in the performance of musical taste but also in displays of musical competence and musicality. Importantly, in breaking, *accents* in the music are expressed *visually*, most often through *angular movements*. To express a musical competence, one must be able to organise movements so as to visually perform accents as seen from the viewpoint of the spectator. When breaking, hitting angular poses such as a bent knee while a leg is crossing over the body, alongside a foot landing right on the snare drum (on 2 and 4) is a perfect example. This is one of the most basic ones as well.

All of these issues overlap. For example, one b-boy teaching a master class workshop explained that, before entering a circle, it is a good idea, if the song is unfamiliar, to listen to the musical track for a bit to get a sense of where the music is going. In doing this, the dancer attempts to predict what will

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<sup>6</sup> YouTube – FLOW – Dj Skeme & Bboy Ynot, Rock Steady Crew's Dynamic Duo  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMmn67eJ9MQ>> [Accessed June 20, 2010]

<sup>7</sup> Kauffmann (2004) writes more extensively about the relationship of music and dance in hip hop and funk dance styles in "Musique et danse hip-hop, des liens étroits à l'épreuve de la professionalization."

happen next in the song. This is a good approach for many of the spaces where this dance is performed, since the DJ, not the dancers, selects the musical tracks.

### Breaking Rhythms

In the late 1970s, a funk music group from Florida, Herman Kelly & Life, released the album *Percussion Explosion*, including the song, “Dance to the Drummer’s Beat.” This song became hugely popular, through hip hop culture’s sample-based obsession with break beats. As an anthem for international breaking events, the instrumental break of this song has continued to be influential through the continuing history of the dance.

This song brings to light some of the mediations and migrations at the centre of an understanding of breaking culture worldwide. The instrumental break of the song features bongos, maracas, and a moment of interruption by timbales. All the instruments are high percussion; for example, there are no deep drums like congas or bass drum. If one were to hear only the instrumental break beat, the South American tradition of percussive instrumental rhythms stands out. Although the break begins simply, the basic beat becomes increasingly ornamented with rolls, while a constant, strong pulse remains on the downbeat. From South American drum sounds, through Florida’s melting pot of different musical styles and record labels, this music would become popular in the birth of ‘breakdancing’ in New York City, before becoming linked internationally to ideas of the looped break beat that became associated with DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash.

As mentioned before, in the historical development of strategies to teach hip hop and funk styles, master class dance workshops, taught by international guests, are a rather late development. Breaking has always involved a type of informal education that includes an element of momentary inspiration or influence followed by long periods of self-reflection, practice and self-teaching. In other words, what can be picked up at social gatherings, parties and battles, very quickly informs the development of a dancer. The fleeting moment of inspiration creates a different kind of learning and that involves the projection from the practitioner, about the dance style they have 'learned', through their own perception of another dancer. This takes on significance with the independent training that follows and this has always included the sharing of music, rather than the sharing of moves. The difference in the current environment is that teaching has become explicit, and moves are being shared in the classroom in a way they never were amongst peers or through social gatherings in the earlier history of the dance.

### Musical Tastes Migrate

In the UK, there is an influx of foreign teachers that come over to share their skills. One workshop/event organiser from Edinburgh, Scotland, pointed out to me that he is very careful about whom he invites over to teach because the 'ripple effect' of their teaching can be seen throughout the UK for a time after. He manages his choices as a promoter because of how large the influence of a single foreign dancer is for the scene over a long period of time. In the last

year, there have been numerous visitors for movie screenings, events, and theatrical showcases, and most of these participants have provided both formal and informal training for local b-boys.

Musical tastes 'migrate' through the teaching of master class workshops. In this context, I observed how the musical tastes of the past creep up on the present and provide meanings for participants. Musical tastes also move across space. In doing so, the ordinariness of translocal relationships and the migration of both dance and music contribute to a negotiated aesthetic that is not as locally secure as it is imagined to be.

Teachers who tour internationally providing master class workshops, in many different contexts, leave traces of their musical tastes in every city through which they move. They do so by performing and sharing their musical taste with their fellow dancers, as an activity. From another point of view, the musical tastes of the students are often shaped through their learning. In other words, the 'newness' and unfamiliarity of songs heard in dance classes, as material, are central to teaching and learning dances cross-culturally. Likewise, familiar tracks are given new meaning, as they are associated with particular kinds of moves and techniques.

This cross-cultural sharing of music is not without its issues. For example, another funk styles teacher explained to me how frustrated he gets when the students want to know the names of all the music tracks he plays during his workshop. He bitterly remarked that students should find their own

music<sup>8</sup>. This is an expression of musical taste. For him, taste requires a practice of exploration outside of the classroom. He does not appreciate students who simply attribute particular music to specific dance styles, because he considers that students' own musical tastes should inform their dance practice. After the classes of another pioneering b-boy, a dancer explained to me with joy how he used new mobile phone technology<sup>9</sup> to find out the names of music tracks that were played during the class, by holding his phone up to the speaker and using an on-line, automatic database. This is a case of musical taste as an activity: an activity that involves snipping selections from workshops.

Both these cases demonstrate how dance classes are serving an integral function: revealing a taste for new music that is good to dance to. In doing so, they reveal what Hennion (2007) suggests when he writes about taste as an activity rather than an attribute of a person, a given or a property. I would suggest that, likewise, the activity of seeking out new music is a central practice of taste "making" for dancers.

These social interactions between teachers and their students produce a shared understanding of aesthetic criteria. Yet the subtleties and nuances of this sharing also create a global sociability that is marked by a contradiction: the taste activity, practiced to acquire new music, is different for the teacher than it is for the students. In other words, selecting the music for the class is a different experience to the one the students have, either at events or in workshops.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence, Edinburgh, May 2007.

<sup>9</sup> A sample of some of the new song recognition software here: "Find the Song Name Without Knowing the Lyrics" <<http://www.labnol.org/internet/find-name-of-songs/12316/>> [Accessed April 8, 2010]

The 'newness' and unfamiliarity of songs for students, as material and sonic objects, are central to teaching about dances cross-culturally. The area where tastes are most in a state of flux is in the interactions between teachers and new students, and this distinction changes over time as the students become more familiar with the songs, genres and rhythms most often selected to accompany each of the dance styles they are learning. In other words, the students' musical familiarity transforms, both with their dance practice, and through cross-cultural exchanges as music migrates.

All of these examples from learning contexts highlight not only the importance of music for dance competence, but also the importance of musical tastes for dance performance. In presenting these examples, I have argued that all dance has a social component, and, just as centrally, that all dance, from the spectacular to the ordinary, can be considered sociologically. In doing so, the aesthetic considerations are revealed.

Music affords dance practices a variety of possibilities, both concrete and imagined. A study that considered the lineages of social groups that dance would resemble a map, both historical and geographical, of musical developments. Within these musical developments, the migration of people to urban centres and the types of music making and circulation of music that happen there would reveal complexities in the exchanges of sound and movement. The history of the teaching of the dance is central to this, and needs to be acknowledged as such.

### Latest Developments in Music and Teaching

It is important to note that many breaking moves can take years to master (as do style and character). Some power moves can take between six months and two years to execute, and longer to execute well. Many dancers never get all of the moves and work around these gaps. However, there is some structure to the way moves are being taught in the classroom, or challenged as indicated from Kujo's perspective.

As described so far in this chapter, teachers have been developing perspectives on how to incorporate music into the learning environment, and in doing so, have changed the ways in which it is discussed and understood. One teacher suggests that students listen before entering the circle, if a track is unfamiliar, so that the students can predict the music's patterns. Another teacher explains that if you love the music that is played at events you are going to dance better; that is just the way it works. A third teacher mentions to students that different songs have different energies and rhythms, and that the students should express moves that match these.

When discussing the role that music plays in learning to break, Renegade explained, in 2010:

Until recently I would say that music's part in learning was more to do with understanding the historical and cultural context of the dance. This has changed as our understanding of music as related to dance increased. Learning about counts, structure, phrases, etc. resulted in a more mature approach to the teaching of the dance which needed to be refined to reflect this education. Relating movements to the punctuation in music or trying to express the texture of the music through dance are all now part of teaching breaking. As such, the music has become very much more the focus of the dance.



In our recent teaching together at the University of East London, Renegade and I would have students listen to the phrasing of the break beat they were working to: how long does the break last? What are the specific features of the break? What instruments are used? What are the distinguishable relationships of beats and instruments? From there, we would discuss the counts of the break beat, where it ends and is repeated and how movement can be aligned with this in different ways to reflect the phrasing of the music. In this sense, the counting resembles how musicians typically use counting, rather than the conventions of counting most often found in contemporary or balled dance. In this analysis, the count is only used to illuminate the structure of the beats: the dance moves are worked out by 'feel'.

It is also clear that teachers think of breaking as a 'dance', and as an art form. Dyzee, for example, tells students that they should think of the dance, "as art" and have patience as they develop their masterpiece, archiving moves that will be used later and waiting for the right combinations before presenting their latest 'works' or, as he describes it, his "latest album".

Another recent development of marketing workshops is for event organisers or dancers to say that teachers will describe in workshops how they will be judging the upcoming competition. However, this newfound clarity and transparency in judgement has become attached to the value of attending workshops for local competitors. Classes have become a place where values are shared or challenged, history is documented and lived, and the rules of the game are enforced.

Teaching the Next Generations

During the time of my research with him (summer of 2007), Karl “Dyzee” Alba still lived in Toronto, before moving to South Korea for work as a b-boy. His apartment at that time was located near one of the most dangerous intersections in Toronto. There, three or sometimes four boys from the block would knock on his door and wait. Karl would pull out a clipboard he kept inside his house with a list of moves that he has taught the boys so far. He would read out the moves and each of the boys would have to demonstrate the technique properly in the hallway. If each of the boys could do the moves properly then Karl would let them into his apartment, where he would teach them some more moves or show them videos of his competitions, etc. When he moved into the apartment, his mom made sure to tell the neighbourhood kids to come by and learn breaking from him.

Dyzee’s living room transformed into a practice space of master and pupils. There was also peer to peer learning inherent in this system because Dyzee did not let the boys into his apartment unless each of them could do the moves. If one of them could not, it was the responsibility of the other boys to help him to get the move, so that they could all advance. This system resembled a master/pupil model, mixed with a peer to peer system of teaching where no one was left behind, and was also, importantly free of charge.

Poe One, another b-boy who is an advocate of the importance of passing along knowledge about the dance to new generations of dancers is often heard saying, “each one teach one.” The saying, “each one teach one”, which is found

peppered throughout rap lyrics for the last thirty years<sup>10</sup>, comes from African American slavery, when blacks were discouraged and actively prevented from acquiring literary skills. Blacks and whites fought, often illegally, to teach slaves to read and write. The phrase, “each one teach one” means that if you have had the opportunity to learn you are obliged to teach another what you have learned. B-boys have championed this phrase in an effort to keep breaking alive in the spirit and essence of the dance form.

Dancers in their thirties<sup>11</sup> are quick to pull out their iPhones and show footage, not of themselves dancing, but of the kids to whom they teach dance. In this way, they resemble proud parents, and their invested interests are clear. However, as has been shown, the development of teaching strategies, is the consequence of an ageing dance culture that has developed an international aesthetic built on learning musical competence, not just musical tastes. This allows for considerations of musicality, which involves value judgements about the agreed-upon performances of competence through dance as set out by teachers, coaches and mentors in this international art form.

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Coolio (1996), Snoop Dogg (2000), Big Boi (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Vietnam of the American Rockforce Crew who won best dancer at BOTY in '99 and Lil' Tim of Airforce crew, who is from the UK both showed me photos of their students in conversations in 2009.

## Chapter 8: Hip Hop Theatre

As the previous chapter showed the impact of master classes on the development of what has come to be seen as an international aesthetic, so the next two chapters describe important transformations in the aesthetics of breaking. These occur in two very different contexts of fairly recent development: live hip hop theatre and video mediations. Although both hip hop theatre and underground videos had their inceptions in various locales in the 1990s (Fogarty 2006), it is hip hop theatre that has received more attention (Davis 2006, Chang 2009).

Hip hop theatre is a hybrid genre mixing hip hop aesthetics with theatrical stage conventions. Various hip hop dances, not just breaking, are often presented together, alongside contemporary dance aesthetics, ideals and institutional frameworks.

By first addressing the established literature on hip hop theatre in America and France, two countries that have received more critical attention, this chapter sets the stage to introduce Breakin' Convention, an international hip hop theatre festival that is based in the UK. Breakin' Convention is one of the largest annual hip hop theatre festivals internationally with its inception in 2004 and was selected for its significance in pioneering support for hip hop aesthetics on stage. Particular attention will be paid to the musical aspects of

these accounts and case studies, adding information collected from interviews with participants during field research.

This chapter charts the historical developments and initiatives that have enabled the emergence of this outlet for expressive performances. The themes of extended families, musical tastes and crew formations, that have been addressed in this thesis so far, are transformed in this context. For example, the organisation of individuals through crew formations is challenged by this theatrical setting, where dancers are required to organise themselves around 'cast' dynamics. This is a significant sociological observation that is contextualised here through emerging performance practices. I include some of the accounts of this shift, by choreographers, b-boys and b-girls, and explain how such a change came about through workshops on hip hop theatre, following the theme of the previous chapter. Likewise, the significance is shown of musical tastes that are mediated through new participants including choreographers and producers.

#### American Accounts of Hip Hop Theatre

1981: "But the rise of breakdancing, and of the Rock Steady crew, was already unstoppable. What began as a folk form, a dance-game among adolescent boys that symbolically asserted various aspects of personal identity and group solidarity, became theatrical and then, in turn, was taken by its younger acolytes back out into the parks and streets." (Banes 1994, 129)

It was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that 'hip-hop theatre' arose as a term to account for the works of various artists in the theatre. In some

circles in the USA, hip hop<sup>1</sup> theatre gained familiarity as a term to describe the work of a generation of artists including dancers, music-makers, and playwrights in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Eisa Davis (2006) cites two of the early examples of the term's appearance, an article written in 1999 by Holly Bass in *American Theatre* and one by Davis herself in *The Source*, written in 2000. Davis (2006) describes hip-hop theatre as a new movement; a syncretic art form; a combination of two 'genres' (hip-hop and the theatre), that represents the hip-hop generation as well as presenting an inter-generational dialogue.

Hip hop theatre as a new genre is organised predominantly through individual artists who are identified as belonging in this category. This new genre is described from its beginnings as a hybrid form, putting together the space of the theatre with what is conceived of as a 'street' or 'urban' expression, based on 'where you're from'<sup>3</sup>.

In Eisa Davis' account, the cultural references associated with the genre are a compilation, often made up of sections or snippets of larger works (i.e. the break of the record becomes a scene in a movie). Davis includes in this compilation not only artists, festival circuits (New York Hip-Hop Theatre Festival, Def Poetry Jam), theatrical pieces such as *TopDog/Underdog*, and representations of art forms in movies (*Beat Street* (Latham, 1984), *Wild style*

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<sup>1</sup> It will have been apparent that some commentators hyphenate the term, "hip-hop". This dissertation prefers the non-hyphenated form, "hip hop", while respecting the terminology of other writers.

<sup>2</sup> According to Roberta Uno (2006) in "Theatres Crossing the Divide: A Baby Boomer's Defence of Hip-Hop Aesthetics" Eisa Davis popularized the term in *The Source* magazine.

<sup>3</sup> Forman (2002) builds a case for a theoretical analysis of space to account for the significance of locality in hip hop music fandom and interpretation of lyrical meaning in rap songs.

(Ahearn 1983), *Flashdance* (Lynne 1983), and *Breakin'* (Silberg 1984)), but also interludes on albums (such as De La Soul's debut), international emcee exchanges (expanding to Columbia, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba), and films such as *Scarface* (De Palma, 1983), *Boiler Room* (Younger, 2000), *Ghost Dog* (Jarmusch, 2000). Here inspirations for and influences on hip hop culture are categorically included within the genre of hip hop theatre.

Dance companies that are listed in Davis' overview include GhettoOriginal (New York City), Full Circle (New York City) and Jonzi D (London). To this list, Roberta Uno (2006) adds Rennie Harris (Philadelphia). Danny Hoch (2006) adds to the list: Capoeira, Olive Dance Theatre (Philadelphia, again) and Benji Reid (Manchester, UK). To contain the scope of this project, I have focused only on those projects that involve dance and music.

Festival event organisers have played a significant role in defining this genre. Uno (2006) represents an American Hip-Hop theatre festival, that he suggests is an institution intended to curate, present, produce and develop hip hop theatre and includes works that are by, about and for the "hip-hop generation, participants in hip hop, or both." This festival is currently represented in the following centres: New York City, San Francisco, Washington, Chicago and Philadelphia.

Jonzi D's role as the Artistic Director of Breakin' Convention bears a resemblance to the significant positions of other festival event organisers. He contributes to discussions that define the genre, as well as shaping the genre through his programming for an international hip hop theatre festival.

Rennie Harris is considered by many contemporary critics and dancers as the pioneering choreographer of hip hop theatre in America. In an interview with Jeff Chang (2009), Harris explains his goal in putting together his theatrical projects. He articulates the creative process in these terms:

I want it to be emotional, I want there to be angst, but I want there to be serenity, and I want there to be, you know, reflectiveness, and I want there to be questioning. In all of us. My goal is: "How do I make the marriage?" (64)

The marriage between theatre and street dance is a particular type of hybrid genre that involves not only music and dance, but also visual art, fashions and films (as seen in the earlier descriptions.) Harris' intention with his creative productions suggests a collective and agreed upon aesthetic of hip-hop as both popular music, in a general sense, and a part of African American history. He describes how dance styles shifted from funk to electro in the 1980s for example, and also the significance of his African American identity to popular music. When describing the aesthetic of his creations, he relates this to jazz:

... it's like that original aesthetic of jazz. That crooked line. That fucking offbeat, that twist, that's what's the hepcats did, that lean. That walk. That's all African American ... Everything that we do is like walking that line of, "Damn! Do we go straight, or do I just make this left over here and figure out where I'm at and get back on path?" In Western construct, they want to glorify the structure, the line, as the guideline, and we like to look at our line as a guideline, not a god-line." (Harris in Chang 2009, 66)

Harris is building an aesthetic argument based on a homology. In a recent account of contemporary b-boy culture in New York City, that excludes stage performances, Schloss (2009) deals with the question of ethnicity in a different way, although also homologous in analysis:



The conventional narrative among dancers is that b-boying was invented by African Americans, but was only popular in that community for a few years. By the late 70s, it had been adopted by Latinos, who became its primary practitioners ... If, just for the sake of argument, we say that b-boying was invented and performed primarily by African Americans for 5 years, then developed and maintained by Latinos for 30 years, which group does the dance really “belong” to? (16)

This line of questioning conceals more than it reveals. Besides denying the biracial identities of many of the most influential participants in the dance, this construes the dance as organised around ethnicity. However, as has been seen, breaking is organised into a hierarchy of skills, and all issues of belonging are centred fundamentally on this premise. A better question might be to ask how individuals and groups, in various countries and with uneven access to resources, have maintained a dance form through *international* networks? And how have these networks been informed by a ‘belonging’ that is organised around musical tastes and dance practices, alongside identifications beyond gender, ethnicity and class? In considering these questions it is important not to ignore the developments of hip hop theatre, or its significance in facilitating some of the international exchanges that built hip hop’s stability and rooted the longevity of the dance. The example of Britcore Rap<sup>4</sup>, created by ‘Black British’ rap groups, that sustained the dance practice in Germany with musical selections that inspired the dancers there, is a case in point and one which happened alongside the emergence of hip hop theatre.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on Britcore Rap, see Appendix D.



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As this chapter will demonstrate, the theatre has played a key role in defining and developing breaking culture internationally. While the contribution of participants of the African diaspora is still an active creative force, this goes alongside the contributions of those dancers of various nationalities including American, Canadian, French, British, Japanese and Brazilian (to name a few). Rennie Harris' allusion to the history of jazz as a source of comparison is telling, in that it situates international global breaking culture within already well-established international musical exchanges and migrations.

<sup>5</sup> Flyer provided by Kevin "DJ Renegade" Gopie, 2010. Also available at [www.djmada.com](http://www.djmada.com) [Accessed December 31, 2010]

In fact, hip hop theatre follows a historical precedent of American artists touring internationally. The United States of America purports to have no national cultural policy, yet it began funding jazz artists on international tours after 1953, through the United States Information Agency (Kammen 1996). These tours were funded in the hope of promoting American values and, ironically, the contempt of jazz musicians for some of the values they were hired to promote made the tours even more popular than had been expected (Von Eschen 2004).

The Smithsonian Institution is one example of a funding body that supported the development of hip hop theatre in the U.S.A. in its beginnings<sup>6</sup>. As Michael Kammen (1996) notes, the first secretary, Joseph Henry, wanted to make sure that there would be no merger between a national museum and the Smithsonian. However his successor, Spencer Baird, reversed the direction of the Institution, and the successor of Baird, Samuel P. Langely, “made it all the more likely that the Smithsonian would come to be regarded as the ‘nation’s attic,’ an institution of memory rather than its guiding gyroscope or compass for cultural affairs” (799). Vera L. Zolberg (2007) points out that the arts are funded in the United States by private support and a, “culture of donation” (107). Kammen (1996) argues that there needs to be sufficient government support for culture to ensure economic success, as well as the growth in people’s participation in cultural practices. He writes:

... what the critics of state support for culture dismally fail to understand is that a diminution or elimination of public support will not prompt an increase in private support. Quite the

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<sup>6</sup> This institute was founded in 1846.

contrary, it leads to a loss of private support. That, in turn, impoverishes the nation ..." (807)

The Smithsonian Institution supported several key moments in the emergence of hip hop theatre. In the first example from the 1970s, Rennie Harris was noticed for his stepping<sup>7</sup> by the Smithsonian Folk Life Centre, who paid him to perform this at high schools in the hopes of preserving an urban folkdance (Chang 2009). Currently, the Smithsonian's National Museum of National History is in the process of building a hip-hop collection out of the artefacts of hip hop's origins including music, graffiti, dancing, boom boxes, fashions and more. The funding for this project initially came from Universal Music and Russell Simmons<sup>8</sup>. This is part of the shift Kammen has identified within the institute which, he claims, supports the mummification of styles, rather than their development.

In 1994, the Smithsonian Institution also sponsored a performance for the America-Japan Festival featuring well-known b-boys and poppers of the time, such as Ken Swift, Popmaster Fabel, Mr. Wiggles and others. In the 1994 piece, "Moments in Motion", presented in Japan at the American/Japan Festival Exhibit, sponsored by the Smithsonian, it is clear that the dancers of this company have developed the theatrical (stage) use of costuming, lighting and music for effect<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Stepping was the name for a local style of dance.

<sup>8</sup> "Hip-Hop Comes to the Smithsonian", from the website for the National Museum of American History.

<<http://americanhistory.si.edu/news/pressrelease.cfm?key=29&newskey=318>>  
[Accessed on October 20, 2010]

<sup>9</sup> The video for this performance has been made available on YouTube by Popmaster Fabel, one of the choreographers and dancers:

Some of these b-boys, who were also members of the Rocksteady crew, were already familiar with aspects of the contemporary dance world, having performed on international tours in the early 1980s. Rosanne (Rosy) Hoare, who was the house choreographer at the Roxy, began to manage Rocksteady Crew then (Rosenwald 1984). Her background was in jazz dance and she used her connections and resources to organise the first international tour. In 1984, she is described as

... probably closer to the groups (often called 'crews') than anyone else in the business. She works with fifty break, boogie and freestyle dancers at the Roxy and wants to 'develop the dancers so that Breakin' can be adapted and accepted into the jazz idiom. It's a whole new realm of movement that is only just beginning to be explored,' she says. (Rosenwald 1984, 74).

Also, Hoare began to distinguish what would be needed for dancing groups to be, "classified as professionals", with skills including, "discipline, dedication and the willingness to take direction and correction" (74).

At the time, the Rocksteady Crew took direction in the making of their record, but complained that they did not have any input into the music that was produced. This song, "Hey You! Rocksteady Crew," went to the top of the British charts in 1983.

Early on, contemporary dance promoters and classically trained dancers became interested in learning the dance, as movement, and in creating shows featuring both styles. This was mainly credited to the initiatives of the ballet dancers. For example, Akiva Talmi, who organised a tour of breakers and ballet dancers, had the aim of legitimising the dance form by changing the venues

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<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7xRXQaBMv8>> [Accessed on September 30, 2008]

where dancers performed. These early moves to the theatre set the stage for what was to come, motivating b-boys and b-girls to learn how to get *credit* for their involvement in such productions.

In 1990, Ann Marie DeAngelo became the founding artistic director of a Ballet company in Mexico. Ballet de Monterrey was the, "first privately funded arts organization in Mexico"<sup>10</sup>. The first work DeAngelo created presented Mr. Wiggles in a leading role. When I asked her about the music for the show, she explained:

PARADISE had music by YANNI - and was created on Ballet de Monterrey, Mexico in 1990. Mr. Wiggles starred in the piece and it was the first time a role was created for a Hip Hop dancer in a ballet.<sup>11</sup>

Very quickly, Mr. Wiggles also began to develop music for theatrical shows.

For example, DeAngelo remembers:

WALK ON used music written by Richard Rodgers for the 2002 Richard Rodgers Centennial combined with music by Mr. Wiggles. He deconstructed some songs such as "Never Walk Alone" and "My Funny Valentine" incorporating a Hip Hop beat and rhythm - again his own music. I created a ballet using him once again, as the central character. In that piece the story was loosely based on West Side Story.

IN THE MIX is a work-in-progress ... and the music is eclectic. Some of it is by Mr. Wiggles and DJ Active Phase. It combines dance genres...<sup>12</sup>

Music is crucial to the development of a hip hop aesthetic, understood by hip hop audiences, and Wiggles' focus on providing an eclectic range of sources with a hip hop beat is in keeping with the sampling and D.I.Y. aesthetics of hip hop

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<sup>10</sup> <[http://www.elsiemman.org/artists/thank\\_you\\_gregory\\_2.html](http://www.elsiemman.org/artists/thank_you_gregory_2.html)> [Accessed August 24, 2010]

<sup>11</sup> Personal correspondence with author, June 25, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence with author, June 25, 2009.

culture. In many considerations of choreographic practice, a choreography that is inspired by musical tastes, and intended to display not only dance meanings, but also musical ones, has been characterised in contemporary dance literature as a beginner's mistake (Preston-Dunlop 1998). Although I will not rehearse or review the fascinating arguments that contemporary dance theorists have created in defense of movement-centered, as opposed to music-centered understandings of dance practice, what is evident is that the shift away from considerations of music has resulted in a lack of understanding, in both theatrical criticism and the institutionalisation of breaking, of how hip hop aesthetics integrate the two.

For b-boys, b-girls and poppers, the situation is complicated by the emphasis, in some representations of hip hop culture, not only on dancing but also on rapping, making graffiti art, and the other elements described by Bambaataa. This has resulted in the fact that those who have created dance works for stage have also, often produced music, rapped and tried their hand at DJing, outside of formalised institutions, and prior to their involvement with hip hop theatre. This situation is changing with newer b-boys and b-girls, as the dance becomes more specialised and the connection between elements is lost.

When hip-hop theatre attempts to combine hip hop cultural practices with theatrical choreography, it is often the case that the dancers find themselves performing choreographic routines and movements which are not conceived in a way which is integrated with the music. Sometimes, for example, the music is changed for dramatic effect. This was revealed explicitly in a conversation I had during field research with DJ/B-boy, Forrest GetEmGump,

who was recently touring the UK for Breakin' Convention as part of the *VII Gems Rock Division* headlining show. Part of their goal with the tour was to demonstrate the significance of music to the dance in the after parties, after the theatrical show.

DeAngelo also recalled that, in the early 1980s and 1990s, hip hop theatre as a genre did not yet exist for her:

At that time, the word "hip hop" did not exist – nor had the "dance genre" been established. We called them "street dancers" or "break dancers" back then. There were also no Hip Hop dance classes. Mr. Wiggles later, was the first one to teach a Hip Hop class in New York at Broadway Dance Center.

I worked with some of the pioneers of Hip Hop since the early '80's and the term hip hop dance/theater is a genre that is just evolving - and mostly in Europe. In fact, it doesn't really exist here - which is odd because Hip Hop started in the Bronx in New York and Mr. Wiggles was a part of that start.<sup>13</sup>

The reversal that has occurred, whereby hip hop theatre is 'imported' from *Europe to North America*, and reorganised as a valuable art form, is key to cultural comparisons and highlights the role of cultural policy in instigating support structures for the development of art.

In the early 1990s, Mr Wiggles, PopMaster Fabel and others helped to validate hip hop theatre to outsiders, through their involvement with contemporary and ballet companies. In an interview I found during my archival research, Mr. Wiggles, on a local television show from New York City in 1992, describes that he is from Puerto Rico but he is not Puerto Rican. In, "The Propulsive Beat of the Urban Street" (Ipiotis and Bush 1991), interviewer Celia Ipiotis remarks positively about Mr Wiggles' participation in the Mexican ballet

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<sup>13</sup> Personal correspondence with author, June 25, 2009.



with DeAngelo. In the interview, Mr. Wiggles speaks about how ballet is different to hip hop dance styles. Alongside, Adesola “D’Incredible” Osakalumi and Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon, his fellow interviewees, he discusses his new company, GhettOriginal.

Wiggles and his partners described their relationship to music in the following way: they get inspiration from the music. To ‘break’ for them means to go off on the break of the record. They articulated their involvement with this dance as being about ‘self-discipline’, rather than connecting it with professional or school orientated dance, and asserted that their style has its own vocabulary. Fabel reminded the interviewer, and the television audience, that street dancers also have spirit and character. They ended the interview with Wiggles explaining how the younger generations are doing ‘rap dancing’ in videos, but give respect to the older generation (them) and their dances (popping and animation represented here, alongside some freestyle rapping as the credits roll).<sup>14</sup>

Here, renown and legitimacy from outsiders come from identification with dance institutions, even newly formed ones, and with styles of dance that are already established, such as ballet. To gain such an entry into the art world, dancers need to establish reputable companies as opposed to being perceived, and perceiving themselves, as a crew. However, as I will demonstrate in the next sections, the dancers consider the cast as an ‘extended family’ for the crews they had already established.

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<sup>14</sup> Since then, Wiggles has collaborated in various shows of Ann Marie DeAngelo as well including “The Variety Show – Jugglin’ Styles,” “Walk On” and an excerpt from “In the Mix!” that also features Honey Rockwell.

GhettOriginal Tours

What will become apparent is that the interactions between dancers from various countries helped to contribute to the building of networks, knowledge about dance technique, and theatrical know-how, all of which had an influence on the shaping of hip hop theatre around the world. I will focus here on the international networks that formed, and on their contributions to the shared aesthetic of a growing international cultural practice. Those dancers who participated in the theatrical shows, and who interacted with formal dance institutions, found themselves at the centre of both cultural memories about the dance and a 'shared' knowledge between various sites. Dancers corroborate each other's histories and significance, within both the contemporary dance world and breaking culture.

In international networks, there was also an emphasis on collaboration between crews that was challenged by the new organisational structure of 'casts,' made up of members from various crews. The dancers still distinguished themselves through crew affiliations, but came together across their crews to form professional casts, as well as, in some cases, corporate partnerships. For example, the original company of GhettOriginal was made up of members of different crews, with varying crew affiliations (as some of them were down with more than one title) including members of Magnificent Force, Rhythm Technicians and Rock Steady Crew, among others. Notably, dancers were expanding their memberships of different groups and crews through these interactions.

The first musical, “So What Happens Now?”, was a success and sold out Public Space 122. In 1992, “Concrete Jungle” told the story of kids victimised by cops, and also featured b-girls such as Anita “Rokafella” Garcia, Masami Kanemoto and Ereina “Honey Rockwell” Valencia. In this production, Joseph “Jab” Abajian spins hip-hop tunes, Q-Unique raps a history of hip-hop and Adesola D’Incrdible Osakalumi, “glides to centre stage and begins to pound an imaginary drum.”<sup>15</sup>

By the time GhattOriginal Productions created the off-Broadway cult classic, “Jam on the Groove” at Minetta Lane Theatre in 1995, the casting issues had sorted themselves into the following categories: there were four producers, including: International Management Group, Mitchell Maxwell, Alan J. Schuster, Margaret Selby. The playwright was GhattOriginal productions, as was the composer and choreographer. The opening night credits also included a set designer, lighting designer, sound designer, mural designer and press representative. The cast for the opening night lists 17 people, including: Peter “Bam Bam” Arizmendi, Leon “Mr. Twister” Chesney, Steve “Mr. Wiggles” Clemente, Zoraya “Zee Boogie” Clemente, Gabriel “Kwikstep” Dionisio, Kenny “Ken Swift” Gabbert, Tamara Gaspard, Scott “DJ Skribble” Ialacci, Antoine “Doc” Judins, Natsuno “NASTY” Koatake, Risa “Rise Freeze” Kobatake, Richard “Crazy Legs” Colon, Adesola “D’Incredible” Osakalumi, Jorge “Fabel” Pabon, Jerry “Flo Master” Randolph, Roger “Orko” Romero and Ereina “Honey Rockwell”

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<sup>15</sup> <[www.thefreelibrary.com/GhattOriginal+Productions+Dance+Company](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/GhattOriginal+Productions+Dance+Company)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]

Valencia.<sup>16</sup> The marketing of the show left the dancers feeling that their primary audience was not aware that they were performing in New York City<sup>17</sup>. Also, Stomp, the other company on the books, was being marketed strongly and they felt that their production had been ‘shelved.’

“Jam on the Groove” toured in France in the mid 1990s. Ken Swift recalls that the Rhythm Technicians and Rock steady Crew had previously toured to France. He remembers doing a show in France in 1994, for example, and returning the following year to see companies in France doing similar versions of their shows. For this tour, “Jam on the Groove” would have fourteen in the cast (dancing) as well as two understudies. Since there were always sixteen spots, people were often replaced as the tours continued.<sup>18</sup> Ken Swift remembers other performers that toured with them, including Remind and Crumbs from Style Elements crew, and Rokafella, Speedy D, Mauritizo, and Zulu Gremlin.

On these early tours, the rule was that dancers would meet up with local b-boys to hang out, practice and share knowledge. During this time, the touring dancers tended not to do ‘formal’ dance workshops, as mentioned in the previous chapter. That is an element of the dance culture that would develop later on. However some of the networks that formed during this time were crucial, especially when local dancers were invited to tour with the show.

One of the European dancers who had the opportunity to tour with the

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<sup>16</sup> <[http://www.lortel.org/LLA/archive/index.cfm?search\\_by-show&id=750](http://www.lortel.org/LLA/archive/index.cfm?search_by-show&id=750)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]

<sup>17</sup> Personal correspondence with one of the dancers in the show, 2010.

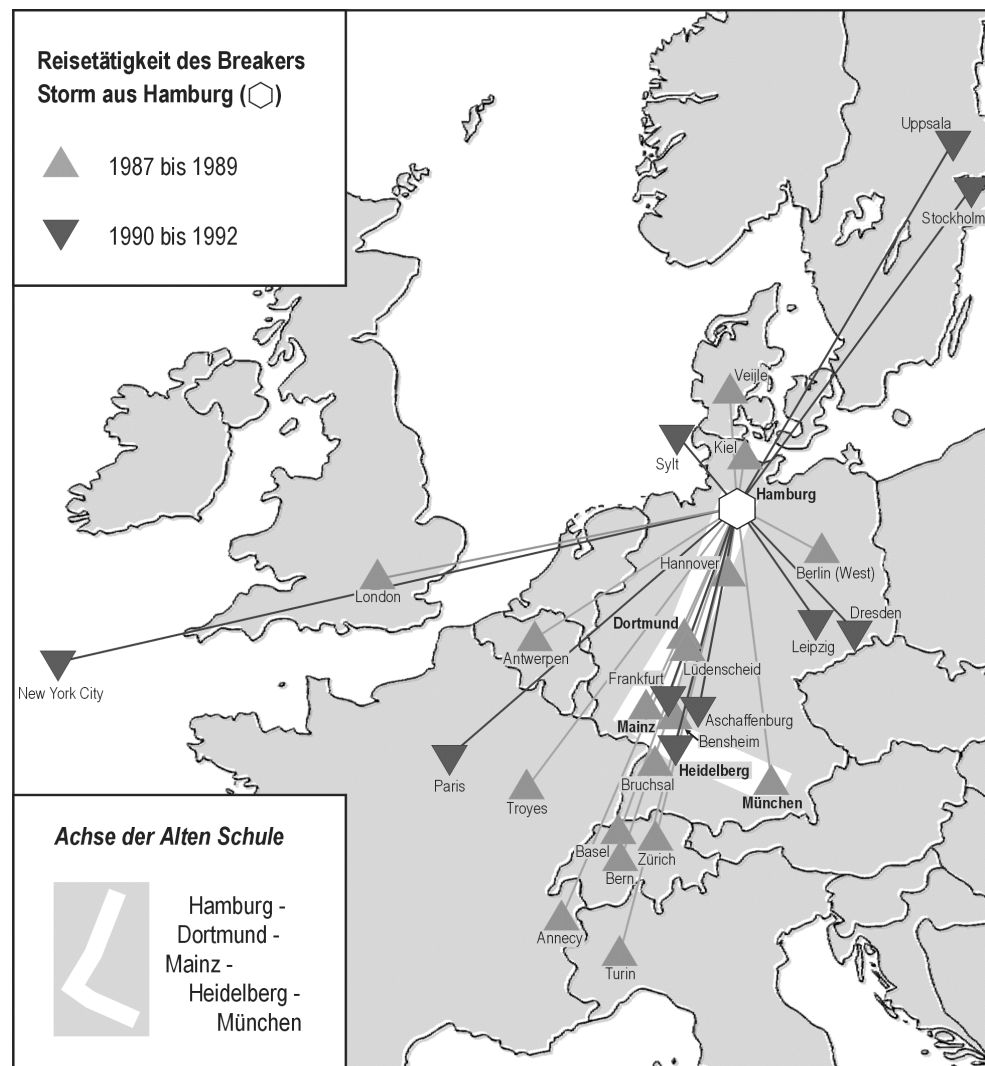
<sup>18</sup> Conversation with Ken Swift, May 28, 2009.

GhettOriginal Production Company was Germany's Storm, who had already spent time in New York City. The principal shows in which Storm performed were in Portland, Maine in 1992, Suresnes, France in 1993 and 1995, Kennedy Centre in Washington, DC, in 1994, as well as some smaller shows in Jersey, and Lincoln Centre in New York City<sup>19</sup>.

Before these tours, Storm had travelled extensively to share aspects of the dance with others, as an advocate. He had also taken time to learn more about the history on his extended trip to New York City. This map of Storm's travels was created by a German hip hop researcher Christoph Mager (2007, 259):

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<sup>19</sup>Personal correspondence with Storm, 2010.



Travel activity of the breaker, Storm from Hamburg, during two time periods: 1987-1989 (light triangles), 1990-1992 (darker triangles).

Storm's engagement with theatrical presentations of hip hop

demonstrates how international networks formed in the emergence of the new genre. Some biographical background will illuminate the experience across cultures of one major participant at this time. The following account is an abbreviated translation<sup>20</sup> from an excerpt of Storm's book, *Von Swipe zu Storm: Breakdance in Deutschland* (Robitzky 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Translated with help from several others, including my German language class teacher and students at the University of Edinburgh.

Niels Robitzky began dancing in 1983. His b-boy name was not yet Storm; he would go by either “Swipe” or “Swipemaster.” By 1986-87 he remembers that most people that he knew who danced in Germany had quit. He continued to do professional shows at this time, although he was getting paid less (about 100 DM/show). He began using the *Tramperticket* (a monthly railcard in Germany) to attend different breaking competitions at this time. In January 1990, Storm and his partner had their first theatrical gig, during one month at the Hansa Theatre in Hamburg. They earned the equivalent of a month’s wage at a factory. The show they performed was seven minutes long. His group performed there twice that year, and the best hip hop dance ‘associations’<sup>21</sup> from France were also invited to perform there.

When Storm visited New York City, a b-boy named Kwikstep arranged for him to meet some of the well-known b-boys there, such as Crazy Legs and Mr. Wiggles. A performance of their company, GhettoOriginal was planned for Paris and the company came from New York, alongside some invited guests such as Zulu Gremlin from L.A. and Masami from Japan. Mr. Wiggles would cut the music for the shows at night-time and rehearsals would take place during the day. The show was half an hour in length. Some dancers would be interchanged as time went on. Other members that would appear were Akanni, who was living in Berlin at the time, and Flo-Master who is originally from DC but who lived in New York City for a time and moved to Los Angeles in the late 1990s. Some of the group also toured the show as, “Jam on the Groove” (Robitzky 2000).

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<sup>21</sup> I discuss ‘associations’ in the next section on French hip hop dance. See Shapiro (2004) for more details.

Storm compared France, Germany and the USA through his experiences at this time. He remembers observing, while visiting New York City, that there was hardly any cultural support for the dance. In February 1993, the whole of the GhettoOriginal group (11 people) flew to Paris to perform the show for two days at the Theatre Jean Vilar. During that time, Storm ran into Gabin from the crew Aktuel Force from Paris, who were also performing at that theatre. The Parisian b-boys, along with Kwikstep and Storm, would train in the lobby of Chatelet les Halles. He also noticed that there was a real increase in the number of dance companies in France. This was unlike Germany, where theatre people were still, “thinking too conservatively” and treating them as street dancers. At this point, the winter of 1993-1994, Storm spent more time in Paris than in Berlin (Robitzky 2000). In the summer of 1993, Storm was in Paris giving an eight-week course in producing hip hop theatre. When Mr. Wiggles could not make it, he sent along Easy Roc from the west coast chapter of Rocksteady crew to replace him. Gabin from Aktuel Force and Emilio from Battle Squad also taught on the course (Robitzky 2000).

From Storm’s account, the emergence of hip hop theatre involved creative collaborations and sharing across various countries. It also involved the support of institutions in Germany and France. The development of France as a cultural hub for the emergence of hip hop theatre will be addressed further in the following section.



## French Hip Hop Dance on Stage

According to sociologists who have been researching the French hip hop dance scene, a small group of key figures within institutions in France nurtured a relationship between theatres and 'street dancers' (Shapiro 2004, Kauffmann, personal correspondence 2007). They did so by providing facilities, formal structures, networks and resources for the transformation of hip hop acts into theatrical productions. In doing so, they also supported various acts from other countries. Writing from France indicates that policy makers, sociologists, social workers and the general public have discussed at length the attributes of hip hop theatrical dance (Shapiro 2003, 2004; Shapiro and Kauffmann 2006; Shapiro 2008). Thus the French b-boys and b-girls on tour are familiar with the historical developments within the theatrical form over time, and its relationship to other elements of hip hop culture, including street shows, competitions and battles.

How hip hop theatre came about in France reveals the initiative of social workers in aiding this early development. In 1983, some young dancers from working-class suburbs near Paris and Lyon worked with educators and social workers to form stable groups of performers that would treat the dance as a theatrical art form (Shapiro 2004). These groups were considered by the government to be legally registered 'associations' and received support from their local governments (Shapiro 2004). The relationships between educators, local government, social workers and dancers grew into more regular support cycles for events and theatrical performances. With time, the public discourse

had switched from discussing breaking in terms of social inclusion and integration, to treating the dance as a ‘bona fide art form’ (Shapiro 2004, 320).

Resources were offered to dancers, who were recruited, given free spaces to practice, and commissioned to create works that would be considered as, “aesthetic endeavours” on a par with, “the status of contemporary dance” (Ménard and Rossini 1994, in Shapiro 2004). This treatment of dance, as an ‘aesthetic’ art form, was the result of cultural policy, various support structures and the contributions of dancers (Shapiro 2003). The productions also, notably, range from the amateur to high art. Many of the initial festivals connected contemporary dance styles with hip hop. Although many changes occurred in the transformation from hip-hop to hip hop ballet (in the French terminology) or theatre<sup>22</sup>, I would like to highlight the musical shifts. Of these, Shapiro (2004) writes:

Concert dance performances also tend to distance themselves from rap, DJing, and hip-hop music. Indeed, many hip-hop ballets draw heavily on other musical conventions – jazz, rock and roll, ancient music, classical, romantic or contemporary music, African or oriental music, Gregorian chants, flamenco, and other forms. Consider *Petrouchka*, for example, produced in 1998 with choreography by Farid Berki and music by Igor Stravinsky and James Brown; *Solo d’Ernesto*, a solo presented in 2000 by Ernesto Cortès and Koen Augustijnen, on *Death and the Maiden*, a quatuor by Franz Schubert; *Culture Choc*, produced in 2001, choreographed by Anthony Egéa, with music by Ludwig van Beethoven and Thomas Drouart; *Dix Versions*, produced in 2001 by the company Käfig, with a score composed by hip-hop old-timer Franck II Louise, on themes from hip-hop and Arab music; *Anoukha*, a piece produced the same year by the company Accrorap that mixed hip-hop and South Indian baratanatyam; and a ten-minute work-in-progress presented in 2000 by two amateur breakdancers with music by Tchaikovsky. (321)

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<sup>22</sup> For more on this, see Shapiro 2004.

Recently, hip hop composers/choreographers such as Franck II Louise have also begun to explore the possibilities of sounds created in real-time by performers.<sup>23</sup> If social groups are said to share musical tastes, that is, crews of b-boys and b-girls who practice together tend to like the same music to dance to, then the new socialisation provided by these institutions has affected the marriage between dance and music in many ways.

One of the ways that the social groups have altered, due to such institutionalisation, is through the incorporation of other participants with different values and demands. For example, Shapiro notes that, in France, funding from both government and various other bodies goes to support 'associations' rather than crews. This means that associations include not only dancers, but also possibly dancers with training in other areas (lighting, management, etc.). The association status also means that groups of dancers are formally engaged and stabilised by this type of commitment.

Notably, one of the transformations to the social groups has meant that girls and women are incorporated more readily into the process (through institutionalisation). For example, the peer-to-peer and self-training of the crews is transformed in some ways to include females who are more likely to have some formal dance training and achievements in school (Shapiro 2004).

Like theatrical pursuits in other countries, there are some performers who feel inclined to drop the name, 'la danse hip-hop' (the term by which the genre is known in France) so they have more freedom to incorporate

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<sup>23</sup> <<http://techtv.mit.edu/videos/564-konnecting-souls-franck-ii-louise>> [Accessed May 31, 2009]

movements, influences and values from other areas, such as African dance, modern dance and acrobatics. Other groups, being respectful of what they see as the 'original aesthetic' of hip hop, try to maintain the purity of the form yet also perform on stage<sup>24</sup>.

There is a younger generation that wants to reject the theatre and return to 'underground' battles as the sole source for expression, where the improvisational elements of dance are valorised. (Shapiro 2004). The battle circuit tends to be supported by hip hop entrepreneurs and by companies selling clothes, videos, etc., whereas the government has traditionally supported the ballets. As Isabelle Kauffmann notes, participants take part in both worlds, often with each activity providing inspiration, release and support not available in the other.

Kauffmann (2004) argues that hip-hop in France was born in the nightclubs, where dancers developed a relationship with the music that is effectively 'collective' listening. They share common practices for listening as well as a familiarity with musical tracks centred around the DJ and the particular club venue.

Another French writer, Bazin (2002) observes that in France:

Hip-hop dance companies do not consider the 'street world' and the 'art world,' to borrow the expressions Howard Becker uses in *Art Worlds*, in terms of an opposition. Choosing one over the others would be giving up on either the experimentation of artistic research or the collective development of popular education and culture ... Thus, for the dance companies, professionalization does not mean the passage from one universe to another, but rather the ability to increase the mobility and the dynamism between the two because of a *double legitimacy*. (104)

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<sup>24</sup> Shapiro classifies the Aktuel Force crew from Paris in this camp.

Kauffmann suggests that there is tension between the street dance practices and systems of validation amongst peers (through battles, cyphers, etc.) and that of the professional world of hip hop theatre.

The significance of the shift from crews to casts in hip hop theatre in France is explained in the excerpts below from interviews that Kauffmann conducted with Karim Barouche, a well-known b-boy from France. In my translation, Karim remarks on the significance of the early workshop, *Sobedo*, with German and American b-boys alongside French ones, for bringing people from different crews together:

*Sobedo* was a course which took place at the TCD (the Contemporary Dance Theatre) with several companies from all over France, and at that time there were contemporary choreographers, people from Capoeira and from African dance, who taught at the theatre on the course, there were, among others, Gabin, Storm, Eazy Roc from the Rock Steady Crew... Emilio, from Battle Squad in Italy, who taught for a while [*break*] and then a selection was made for the creation of *Sobedo*, but in the end only people from Paris were chosen. That's to say, there were four companies, which were Aktuel Force, Boogie Saï, Macadam and Art Zone, which were picked for the first performance, and really that's the first time that several companies were united to work together. In general it was the case that each company worked on its own, ... it was really, you could say a challenge, at the level of a group, at the level of what ... at the level of the institutions because already the institutions didn't believe it. Yeah, not hip-hop companies, to make a production lasting an hour could never work with different companies, with loads of dancers; there were 20 dancers, 20 dancers on stage, yeah! With 20 dancers that would never work, that's a big challenge. Because ... to have good relations between groups, that's difficult, there are disputes, there are slanging matches, lots of stuff, but in the end the project happened and was performed three times at the Paris Casino. To date that's the only group... that's the only hip-hop group that's performed at the Paris Casino. ... it was a big success, from the first night, it was blinding every night. ... And after that there was a tour round the whole of France for two months.

As for changes in the aesthetics for theatrical dances, Karim recalls:

Karim: Like, like in *Sobedo* I also learned another thing, people never stopped saying to me, listen Karim, when you dance – because you see I was timid – when you dance, look at the audience! And it's there, it's there that, it lasted a while; it lasted quite a bit of time, two and a half months, of touring and every time I was on stage with my head down and that's what you saw.

Isabelle Kauffmann: Even on stage...

Karim: Even on stage, because I was really timid! I was there, I knew my steps I knew them by heart, but I was so scared to be in front of an audience that I always danced with my head down. People said to me, yeah Karim everything you do is great, but, try, try, try to raise your head, yeah yeah I tried, and I got there but I have to say, frankly it was a tough struggle, for sure! ... Now if you have to categorise the companies, for breaking there is only Aktuel [Force]. I'm telling you about a company, OK? There's only Aktuel; there are groups, there are Breakin' groups which do ... they do shows, all that. But that's only shows. But for actual companies who make theatre performances, there's only Aktuel who break. For the rest it's all uprock, popping, locking, or both. Yeah or both of them. Based, much more based on up-rock than on the floor and again you see the thing that's a pity, like I just said a while back, there are companies which make big theater shows, but they're forced to call on breakers, just to do something for a particular moment, a special part of the performance. You understand?<sup>25</sup>...

Karim is pointing out that breaking performances and participants who break are minimally represented in the newer developments of hip hop theatre which

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<sup>25</sup> More from the interview on the distinctions:

Karim: *Black Blanc Beur*, when it happened at La Villette in '96, there were breakers, there was Xavier I think, there was Isham and there was Blaise, at that time they were all part of *Black Blanc Beur*. The rest of the time you see people, people dancing nein nein nein nein nein, all through the performance, nein nein nein. Worse after a while there's a bit of breaking. But the breaking part, it's a show; you don't see the individuals but a group. D'you understand? There's no, there's no, no, no, no real collective in the groups that you see, I'm speaking about floor work, which really makes a spectacle, but at the level of floor work, that's to say with entries, somersaults euh real choreography. It's just generic things, you do some up rock, a somersault, you leave; the other guy does his thing, he leaves after, you see. There's not really any put-together choreography eh. It's more little bits like that, hop hop hop hop.

actually focuses more on styles such as popping or locking. Performing on a theatrical stage changed the way that the dance was performed, and its relation to music. The music is set before the performance, which means that the dancers know what they will be performing to. This changes the interaction of the dancer with the DJ, and the dancer with the audience. The aesthetic evaluations are different.

B-boys and b-girls also learned to perform towards the audience, both landing freezes to face the crowd and remembering to look up and project out to the back of the room. To be seen from the back row, the movements of the b-boys and b-girls also have to become more pronounced, larger and more obvious for the non-participants. Also, as mentioned earlier, the shift from crews to cast resulted in social changes. 'Associations' in France had to be organised, and through this development professional relationships were based on formal partnerships. This is similar to what was happening with the b-boys and b-girls from New York City, who were becoming corporate partners and learning to play by the rules of art worlds in order to get credit, get paid and get copyright for the work that they did. In some cases, this has meant that particular performances cannot be restaged without the permissions of all those that own the performance. All of these issues are part of the professional dance world, and breakers' engagement with them is a sign of the consecration of the dance as a legitimate art form, with participants learning the rules of a different, already established game.

## Breakin' Convention

*"Born and bred in England (yeah man yeah man)  
Down the road from the Docklands (gotta gotta go gotta go)  
Slum of the Englishman (yeah man yeah man)  
They paranoid over us Black men"*<sup>26</sup>

Jonzi D, *Aeroplane Man* (Murray 2000)

UK's Jonzi D, Artistic Director of the international hip hop theatre

festival, Breakin' Convention, describes hip hop theatre in the following way:

Hip hop theatre as a genre is quite simply the techniques and artistic disciplines that come from hip hop culture so that's Breakin', poppin', locking, street dance, graffiti art, mcing/poetry, djing, beat making and beat boxing. All of these are used in a theatrical context in the hip hop theatre genre.<sup>27</sup>

Although commentators warn against taking music and genres, "on their self-descriptions" (Hennion 2003, 5), Jonzi D's account makes clear an engagement in his own work with elements of popular culture and with his formal training at a dance conservatoire. The support that Breakin' Convention has provided for international hip hop artists is comprehensive. Recently, in 2009, Ken Swift's group, the VII Gems' Rock Division, headlined the UK tour of Breakin' Convention. One of the American promoters had the following to say:

The BC tour was funded almost entirely by Sadler's Wells [in the UK]. Their funding is one of the most extensive at that level in the world for Breakin'. Nothing on that scale would ever get funding in NYC or anywhere in the states. It (Breakin'/hip hop) is not as valued in the USA as in other countries. For it to be taken to major theaters and major funders now is, unfortunately, not really plausible here.

We wanted to bring an extra dancer, which we funded through [the dancer's] sponsor (but only about half of her plane fare) and

<sup>26</sup><<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&VideoID=4352831>> [Accessed April 8, 2010]

<sup>27</sup> Jonzi D interview with Jo-Ann Hamilton to discuss Breakin' Convention 2009 at Sadler's Wells from: <[http://www.itzcaribbean.com/jonzid\\_Breakin'convention.php](http://www.itzcaribbean.com/jonzid_Breakin'convention.php)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]



VII Gems' own pocket. We wanted to make sure there was old school and female presence and were super dedicated to making sure our cast represented that.

Jonzi D's most well known film collaboration is *Aeroplane Man*. Jonzi D made this film with director Alison Murray in 2000, although he wrote the original version of this performance over fifteen years ago. The character Jonzi D portrays is black and explains that he was born in England. The scenario of this theatrical film is that everywhere he travels around the world he meets people who tell him he does not belong, including where he was raised. Even in Africa, he is told by a character (also played by Jonzi) that he does not know his mother's tribe. These events are based on his own life experiences, even if they are portrayed with some creative licence. The early performances of this scenario are what established Jonzi D as a pioneering hip hop theatre director and performer.

Young dancers from the UK who are interested in learning hip hop and funk dance styles often look to American dancers for inspiration and techniques. In *Aeroplane Man*, Jonzi D articulates what it is like to arrive in America, as a Black British rapper, and be made fun of and told he is not real because of his accent. Jonzi D suggested to me that *Aeroplane Man* is about experiences of migration, and in this way it links to themes that are broader than what is often referred to as the 'Black British' perspective. He related his performance of travel, homeland and questions of identity to the every day histories of most people in today's global environment.

This portrayal of the ordinariness of migratory experiences resonates with the ideas of British cultural theorist, Paul Gilroy, who argues that

'conviviality' refers, "to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in post-colonial cities elsewhere..." (2004a). Likewise, hip hop culture has become a source and inspiration for identities and belonging, although these are tested both locally and internationally. With each new cultural exchange, and each new location, identities are remapped and renegotiated as performances are presented in new contexts. The international festival that Jonzi D imagined borrows from these experiences of both the ordinary and the spectacular.

In 2005, Alistair Spalding, the Artistic Director of Sadler's Wells suggested that, "For me Breakin' Convention was a moment in the evolution of hip hop dance theatre in the UK," and Jonzi D, the Artistic Director of Breakin' Convention, responded, "Definitely – Breakin' Convention revealed a sleeping giant called Hip Hop dance to the sleepy UK arts establishment."<sup>28</sup>

The very first Breakin' Convention was held at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in 2004. Spalding, who collaborated on the project with Jonzi D, asked about the, "apprehension from yourself and others in the Hip Hop Dance Theatre community about such an event happening at an institution such as Sadler's Wells." Jonzi D replied that the:

unfamiliarity of Sadler's Wells as a space for genuine Hip Hop events was a concern, mainly because of the lack of Hip Hop audiences that frequent the venue. I feel that the marketing for companies like Bounce and Rennie Harris have targeted the existing Wells audience who want to try something 'different,' or something for 'the kids.' Considering the negative image of rap

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<sup>28</sup> In September 26<sup>th</sup> 2005, the Foundation for Community Dance posted an interview about Breakin' Convention.

<[http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview\\_id=17864](http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview_id=17864)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]

music in the media, I was also worried about how Sadler's Wells would react to an authentic Hip Hop audience. Will they be expecting a gang of gun-toting, young black thugs hell bent on the rape and pillage of this hallowed temple of artistic excellence.<sup>29</sup>

Spalding brought up the "immediate recognition of skill and creativity in the performances from the audience", to which Jonzi responded:

I blatantly expected that! The live Hip Hop audience always makes noise to show appreciation. It's hard to stifle a reaction when someone does over fifty continuous head spins! The fourth wall doesn't exist in most Hip Hop performance, even in the most abstract theoretical work. Victor from Rubberbandance told me he wasn't sure whether nearly 2000 mostly under 21 year olds screaming the roof off Sadler's Wells was right for their work.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most dynamic elements of the Sadler's Wells performances, in fact, was the negotiation that the emcees, including Jonzi D, had with the audience. The two emcees of each night hyped the crowd by getting them to cheer and make noise, just as they would at a rap show. However, when an act from France came on in 2007, a solo performance by a French b-girl who took off her shirt during the performance, Jonzi D reminded the crowd beforehand to be quiet (and respectful) because now they were going to see some *art*<sup>31</sup>. So in some ways, he was negotiating between making noise - supporting hip hop through sound and gesture from the audience - and the conventional, 'high brow' response of quiet and reserved appreciation for performances that fit more typically with that model.

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<sup>29</sup> Jonzi D from the Foundation for Community Dance website:

<[http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview\\_id=17864](http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview_id=17864)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]

<sup>30</sup> <[http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview\\_id=17864](http://www.communitydance.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=22505&isa=DBRow&op=show&dbview_id=17864)> [Accessed June 23, 2009]. *Rubberbandance* is a Canadian hip-hop theatre company headed by Victor, based out of Montreal. Many of the dancers have been featured on K-OS music videos.

<sup>31</sup> My personal observation, from Breakin' Convention festival of 2007, in London at Sadler's Wells.

Another transformation of space that Jonzi D advocated concerned the way that the lobby was used in Breakin' Convention, to capture the essence of hip hop culture. Local dancers (poppers, lockers, b-boys and b-girls mainly) were encouraged to dance in the lobby and crowds formed to watch as the DJs played music during the intermissions and before the show. People from the audience could join in if they felt like it and become part of the show. This transformation of a conventional theatrical space, "the lobby," facilitates active participation by the spectators.

Because the event took place in a typical theatrical dance venue, the event was covered in the mainstream press. The audience for the event, however, was not considered to be the regular audience for a Sadler's Wells performance. For example, in the *Times* on May 8, 2007, dance critic and reviewer, Donald Hutera<sup>32</sup> wrote:

It's tempting to review the audience as well as the shows at Breakin' Convention, the annual festival of international hip-hop dance theatre that celebrated its fourth edition at Sadler's Wells on the Bank Holiday weekend. At no other event in the entire London dance calendar do the spectators play so vital a part. Noisy, communal and predominantly youthful, they are also eagle-eyed observers of an incredible range of skills and styles.

I was tempted myself, as a researcher, to get an insider view into the audience. During my observations of Breakin' Convention in 2007 in London (all three nights), and on tour to various other areas of the UK, I discovered an interesting response. When I spoke informally with contemporary dancers, music students and sound design students about the performances after the

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<sup>32</sup> He has ties to Sadler's Wells and has written extensively on dance for various newspapers.

show in Edinburgh, those whose aesthetic appreciation was closest to the performers whom I had interviewed were actually the sound design and music students. For example, Brazilian performer, Frank Ejara created the sound and the movement for his piece, and sound design students enjoyed the play of trying to figure out what came first, the music or the movement. Whereas students and former students from a conventional dance conservatoire or University that I spoke with found the performance to be merely “tricks”, and more about the music than the dance. This was pointedly a criticism.

#### A Taste for the Theatre

I would like to return to my ethnographic participant observation in Scotland during this section because my introduction to hip hop theatre as a phenomenon happened here. It was in Scotland that I was first exposed to the significance of the Breakin’ Convention festival for various, local UK hip hop scenes. One of the versatile dancers that I met in Edinburgh, Scotland was Matt Foster. Matt is a member of the Random Aspekts b-boy crew and also a dancer for David Hughes Dance Company. At Dance Base he taught dance classes and held residencies during my field research in Scotland in early 2007. One of the first issues that Matt brought up was his interest in theatrical performances. He explained that the German b-boy, Storm, mentioned earlier, was a huge influence on his crew, who were interested in doing performances onstage using media and music.

When I went to see *Freshmess*, a Scottish hip hop company founded by Allan Irvine and Wallace Sulley in 1996, featuring another member of Matt’s

crew, Tony Thrills, I got another perspective on this taste for the theatre. I was running late and had not eaten, and so I asked when I ordered a bun if I could take this into the theatre with me (looking doubtful of course). The young woman working the bar assured me that it would be fine because, "... it's just a hip hop performance!" Here, as in the case of the transformed lobby, hip hop's entrance into the theatrical venue does not always or necessarily change the ideological values held about hip hop culture, regardless of the context in which it is presented.

I spent a fair amount of time during my first months of research, in 2007, in Glasgow. B-boy Sideshow Maule and b-girl/DJ/emcee Shelltoe Mel would often pick me up at the train station and take me to various practices and performances. Both are members of the Flyin' Jalapeno crew.

Mel had decided to undertake a theatrical performance for Breakin' Convention, that would be touring the UK for the first time that year (2007). She solicited the help of DJ Colin Millar of Edinburgh to create the musical soundtrack for a show, and the b-boys from the Flyin' Jalapenos crew to create the dance performance. This proved to be a quite difficult task: finding rehearsal space, getting dancers to show up (and on time) for rehearsals, getting b-boys to take rehearsals seriously, and all the other theatrical preparations.

Mel asked if I could help out by dancing with the crew for their performance. Mel had a concept which was to express the Glaswegian experience of hip hop and its divine intervention in the life of a couple of *neds*. A *ned* is a slang word for 'non educated delinquent'. The performance went over well in the local press, perhaps since it featured a theme that tends to go over

well in hip hop's manifestations worldwide. That is, local audiences enjoy the re-working of hip hop's essence for local politics and expression. Tony Mitchell (1996) has written about the 'glocal' contexts of hip hop culture outside the USA, borrowing the theme from Roland Robertson's (1995) explanation of 'glocalization.'<sup>33</sup> Here the local reworking, and the use of the term 'neds', implies a class dimension of hip hop in Glasgow, with a celebratory narrative of hip hop's power of salvation.

DJ Colin Millar<sup>34</sup> created the musical landscape for the theatrical piece which included a chopped up, re-edited mix from the following tracks:

Slick Rick - Children's Story  
 Off Side - Small Deal  
 Run DMC - Walk This Way  
 MC Mell'O' - Coming Correct  
 Afrika Bambaataa & James Brown - Unity  
 KRS-1 - Sound Of Da Police  
 The Beatles - Within You Without You/Tomorrow Never Knows  
 Sergio Mendes - Magalenha  
 Kraftwerk - Tour De France  
 Peech Boys - Don't Make Me Wait  
 The Jonzun Crew - Electric Boogie Encounter  
 Hot Streak - Body Work  
 Captain Rock - The Return Of Captain Rock  
 Rock Steady Crew - Hey You (The Rock Steady Crew)  
 Newcleus - Jam On It  
 Dope Inc - Born With A Dope Affliction  
 Monie Love I Can Do This (Downtown Mix)  
 Eric B and Rakim – Know The Ledge  
 Hardnoise – Untitled  
 Jungle Brothers - On The Run  
 DJ Mink featuring 2wice The Trouble - Hey! Hey! Can U Relate? (Acapella)  
 II Tone Committee - Taking of the Underground 1,2,3  
 Prodigy – Poison  
 Big Pipe Robert Murphy - Pop Pudding  
 Hijack - Hold No Hostage<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> cf. Giddens (1990, 64)

<sup>34</sup> Personal correspondence, August 12, 2010.

The distinctions between local acts and touring groups were clear backstage: the headline b-boys from France trained every day for three hours and did a lengthy warm-up before their show, with ice baths after where necessary. The Glaswegian crew enjoyed hanging out with each other in the dressing room and visiting the local *chippie* (fish and chip restaurant) for a bite to eat.

#### Making Music for the Show

Hip hop dancers who have moved into theatre performances, such as Mr. Wiggles in the USA and Franck II Louise in France, have begun to create the music as well as the choreography for their shows. This is not surprising, since musical knowledge (skills and competence), tastes and judgements are central to hip-hop dance practices, especially in battles (competition). Eclectic music selection is crucial, not only to the creative practice of theatre choreographers but also to the meanings that hip hop audiences perceive in the theatre. For hip hop audiences, the music always underwrites the visual meanings ascribed to the dance. Thus “Classical” music is often stereotyped to signify high brow tastes or high art, regardless of precisely which music is being referenced and where it fits historically within the context of European orchestral music.

In the early years of the 1980s, before the development of hip hop theatre as a genre, the European tours by American dancers had more to do with selling records (the “(Hey You) The Rocksteady Crew” single, for example). Ken Swift recently recalled coming to the UK for the first time in 1982 when he was 17 years old. He performed in France for a week and then took a boat

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<sup>35</sup> For more about Hijack and the significance of British hip hop, see Appendix D.



across the English Channel.<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1980s, dancers such as Ken Swift were presented alongside artists of other mediums. For example, in 1983, the Roxy Tour, featured Rocksteady Crew, Afrika Bambaataa, Fab Five Freddie and many more performers (becoming the first international hip hop music tour).<sup>37</sup> The label that put out Rocksteady's gold hit, "(Hey you) The Rocksteady Crew", went out of business and their deal was shelved by Virgin Records. In 1991, Mr. Wiggles and Popmaster Fabel (Magnificent Force crew) were credited for approaching Crazy Legs with an idea for a hip hop musical, "So What Happens Now?". Before that time, however, both Popmaster Fabel and Mr. Wiggles had been involved in theatrical shows with contemporary and ballet dancers. For example, Ann Marie DeAngelo remembers that:

Fabel was a part of a show called THE LAST OF THE BEST. That was probably the first time a "street dancer" (as they were called in the 1980's) integrated into a dance company - before Mr. Wiggles actually. The two of them used to work out routines together. In the show, Fabel also painted a graffiti painting. In Mime he told the philosophy of the show in what I called THE F.I.G. Principal (Feel It Given, Face It Going, Focus It Gotten) about positive thinking/creative visualization/manifestation.

The music was an eclectic mix - from George Winston, to Malcolm McClaren, to original songs written by me, to David Byrn, to Mozart and Bach, to Kraftwerk, to singers like Bette Midler.

The shows were funded by the funds received from tours and private donations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ken Swift May 28, 2009 Newcastle (correction on year from Dansiz website) and Shapiro notes that RSC came to Paris in 1982 (2004, 319).

<sup>37</sup> [www.dansiz.com/articles/hip-hop/hip-hop-rock-steady-crew.html](http://www.dansiz.com/articles/hip-hop/hip-hop-rock-steady-crew.html)

<sup>38</sup> Correspondence with DeAngelo June 27, 2009

These tours and performances abroad also provided dancers with the opportunities to meet each other 'outside' of the institutions. That is, dancers from various countries would meet up on a mutual level outside of the theatre, to share knowledge, videotape each other, inspire new developments through sharing cyphers, moves, structures and fashion tips. The flyer<sup>39</sup> included below highlights the international exchange that occurred between key influential b-boys and b-girls at that time:



<sup>39</sup> Flyer provided by Kevin "DJ Renegade" Gopie, 2010.

The tours and travels to various countries also enabled dancers to continue to build their careers and experiences across the shifts in taste of the general public in various places. When interest for the dance would die out in one country, there would always be interest somewhere else. With a limited number of devoted dancers, internationally, pushing and progressing the art form, these performances were crucial.

During my field research in L.A. in 2007, I was invited to watch Jacob “Kujo” Lyons and Catfox preparing a hip hop show, called “Breaking the Cypher”, featuring b-boys and b-girls. As mentioned in other chapters, there are often differences between personal tastes, and collective tastes that represent a community of b-boys. During a car ride from one rehearsal, where Kujo was choreographing and dancing, to another rehearsal, for a different show of physical theatre where Kujo was a performer, Kujo explained his interest in experimental, electronic music. He showed me various CDs of experimental (electroacoustic) music that he enjoyed. However, while he was assembling musical materials for the show he was doing with his team, the process involved different sorts of selections. He chose well-known music tracks for breaking that were familiar to the whole ensemble.

During the performance, different dancers would be featured for different counts of one particular song. In rehearsals, b-boy Machine (of Rockforce crew) was overjoyed at the part of the song that he was assigned for his solo during rehearsal. “That’s the best part of the song!” he responded enthusiastically. When Kujo prepared music for his own dance company, Lux Aeterna, the songs reflected his own personal tastes rather than those of the

groups, as he is the Artistic Director in this case. When I asked Kujo to articulate the distinctions between dance and movement, he had the following to say:

Kujo: On the surface the distinction is as simple as one requires rhythm and the other does not. But it gets much deeper than that, because you have so many dance forms or manifestations of dance in terms of improvisation or choreographed pieces that don't directly relate to the music that they are being performed to or don't have an overriding or underlying sense of rhythm to them. And that's sort of the direction that I've been heading in quite a bit

Mary: ok

Kujo: 'Cause in most dances it's that kind of *je ne sais quoi* that is being expressed that's something that you're trying to convey that is more important than making the movement match the music. And in that regard any movement can be a dance, anything at all can be a dance. What matters is your intention, what you want to convey and how you want to convey it and not so much any general aesthetic rules that you or someone else can follow because of sets of rules that are collectively arbitrary by nature. They weren't handed down by God they were made by people ... at some point in time. Much of it was determined by whim, you know, by sort of visceral opinions like I feel it should be this way so it is this way so let's make it this way so everyone else has to follow it just because this is what we feel like doing. That's how rules in breaking can be about, this is what we have to be doing so let's make everyone else do this. And if they don't do this they aren't breaking. Not to say music doesn't matter but again its how you do it, what you want to convey and how you convey it. In general the lines separating each of the various disciplines, physical or otherwise, aren't clear at all they are very blurred by nature again because it always depends who you ask: the location of the line, the precise location of the line, depends on who you ask about it. You can ask one b-boy what it takes to BE a b-boy and he'll give you a very different answer from another b-boy even if they are both from the same neighborhood or part of the same ... or just have different filters. They are different people with different sensibilities, different opinions and so and so far. I think that's interesting, that paradox.

Mary: Which paradox?

Kujo: The fact that its at once a principle and also collectively arbitrary. The stone is as liquid as water. I like the image of plato

or clay that can constantly shift shapes. Could be one hard shape and it can be remolded into another whole shape but its always clay no matter what you mold it into. That's how I see art in general. Something that is formless but can be formed and than unformed and reformed again, etc. etc.<sup>40</sup>

Kujo is more interested in creative movement than the relationship between music and dance. For b-boy Machine, having a great part of a song to dance to in a theatrical b-boy performance means better possibilities for his performance.

In a second example, DJ Forrest Getemgump, who toured as part of the VII Gems Rock Division show for Breakin' Conventions in 2009, discussed his appreciation for music in our interview, which took place at a record shop in Newcastle. He was invited to tour with the group, and to DJ as many of the after parties as they could arrange. This is because the dancers on tour want to make sure that they hear musical selections that they will love, while out dancing after the show and sharing with local dancers.

Forrest Getemgump's involvement with hip hop theatre has also included work with *Jam on the Groove*, Rennie Harris and other companies from the United States that are no longer active. What he has to say about his experience with dancing to "wack" (bad) music on stage is revealing, as is the distinction between cyphers and battles (part of b-boy culture) and theatrical performances. The following interview segment was taken from a well-known French website for information about breaking called *style2ouf* (intended for a b-boy/b-girl audience):

When did you turn from a Bboy into a DJ? How did this process look like?

Forrest Getemgump: I never stopped being a b-boy. I still do

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<sup>40</sup> Personal correspondence, summer 2007

both but I have been doing more DJ gigs than dancing gigs over the past couple of years. I started Djing in the mid 80's My friend DJ Swel got me into it. I used to go to his house after school and watch him cut up breaks. On my 16th birthday I went out and bought my first pair of turntables and some records and the rest is history. *I still dance to this day but I don't practice everyday like I used to. If a beat drives me I will get down. I had to take a break from dancing. I was doing a lot of theater and I basically got burned out. I was doing choreography that I didn't like and I was dancing to wack music. I did this almost every night for a couple of years and it eventually got to me [my italics].* I was trying to keep my skills up while I was on the road but fell into a slump because I like to practice by myself and do my own regiment but there was no place and no room to do that on the road. When you know in your heart 'n' soul that you don't believe in something but you got to get out there and perform you just feel unmotivated before you do it. When I'm searching for reasons to get motivated then there is a problem. My desire to dance isn't completely gone but I just need my time to feel it when I feel it and not force myself to dance.

I never forced myself to dance before. I just did it because I loved it. You know sometimes in relationships you don't fall out of love but you just need a break from the person. I guess that is what I'm going through LOL. Don't get me wrong, I'm thankful and grateful that I had to opportunity to travel all over the world The experience of touring and traveling was cool and definitely worth it. However on the dancing end when you have non breakers choreographing for breakers then you end up having to do wack stuff and it just doesn't feel right. The only shows I really liked doing was Cool Heat Urban Beat and Legends of Hip-Hop. None of them are touring consistently now. When I decided to quit the show and got off the road for a while I started to enjoy playing records more.”<sup>41</sup>

Here Forrest presents the experience of being involved with theatre dance, as a professional dancer, as being one that took away both his desire to dance to music (that he did not like) and to do movements that he was interested in doing. His dance practice, which was based on self-discipline, was also disrupted by the touring schedule. This is common for many dancers, and

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<sup>41</sup> <<http://www.style2ouf.com/en/knowledge/interviews/1093-dj-forrest-gump>> [Accessed June 23, 2009]

others in the entertainment industry. His engagement with music that he likes to dance to, and the choice to move in a way he likes, is a part of breaking culture in a way that it is not in the development of contemporary dancers who learn the choreography of others as a professional practice quite early on.

Recall what Sally Banes said at the beginning of the wave of popularity for 'breakdancing' in the early 1980s:

Before the media turned breaking into a dazzling entertainment, it was a kind of serious game, a form of urban vernacular dance, a fusion of sports, dancing, and fighting whose performance had urgent social significance for the dancers. After media, participation in breakdancing was stratified into two levels: professional and amateur. For the pros, breakdancing had become a theatrical art form with a technique and a vocabulary that, like ballets, could be refined and expanded. On this level, competition took on new meaning. It was no longer a battle for control of the streets, for neighbourhood fame, or to win your opponent's 'colours' (T-shirt with a crew insignia). Now cash prizes, roles in Hollywood movies, and European tours were at stake. For the amateurs, the element of competition had diminished. (Banes 1985, 144)

Now, two completely different realms of hip hop on theatrical stages, besides breaking competitions, have been created, each with a distinct, self-sustaining set of structures and support. First, there is the hip hop theatre performed by those who also cyphered and competed against each other in the earlier days. Second, there is the rise of choreographed 'hip hop' dance that is taught in workshops and performed in competitions such as Hip Hop International in Las Vegas. In other words, hip hop dance styles such as breaking have spawned whole new worlds of hip hop dance, including not only hip hop theatre but also 'hip hop' as a wholly distinct dance style and set of movements, distinct from breaking. This new hip hop world is disconnected from the cultural practices

referred to in the rest of this dissertation as hip hop culture. The dancers of this style do not share space with b-boys and b-girls, who are similarly disdainful of this new 'hip hop style.' For breakers, these hip hop dancers have no commonality with them and are seen as 'commercial' dancers who do not understand the culture, history and movements associated with hip hop culture. For the new 'hip hop' dancers who teach and learn in hip hop dance classes and workshops, and who have their own competition circuits and styles of stage performance, b-boys and b-girls are seen as purist and dogmatic and found to be generally disagreeable.

This chapter has laid out some of the historical developments of hip hop theatre, as a straightforward, relatively faithful timeline of participants' accounts. It has also demonstrated the contributions of those outside the culture, such as contemporary choreographers, promoters and government funding bodies. Hip hop theatre has been characterised as a hybrid or marriage between two worlds and the problematic situation of the music created by b-boys and b-girls, among others, for these performances, has been discussed. A later chapter will address another aspect of staged, hip hop performances: the resurgence of international competitions, instigated by b-boys in countries such as Germany and England.

The theoretical significance of this chapter has been to situate a shift from crews to theatrical 'casts' within b-boy/b-girl structures. Here casts, selected by b-boys and b-girls, in the emergence of hip hop theatre, are extended families and represent affiliations of crew members with other crews, and with the larger 'crew' of theatre staff. International guests, such as Storm



and others, joined New York City b-boys and b-girls on tour and on stage, helping to establish hip hop as a theatrical format on stage, while simultaneously keeping the relationship between dance and music essential through the movement of dancers into musical production for shows.

## Chapter 9: Video Mediation

Video mediation, and the subsequent technological developments of the Internet, have transformed the aesthetic of breaking and have provided avenues for the articulation of various musical tastes. As this chapter will demonstrate, videos have not only provided inspiration for dancers worldwide, but have also provided a key source of promotion for b-boys and b-girls. Here I make a number of different arguments about the significance of video mediation for breaking worldwide, and I do so to challenge the dominant view of dancing as an ‘unmediated’ form that is more localised in meaning than other popular cultural forms (as argued by Thornton 1995; Schloss 2009).

This is significant to the findings of recent accounts of breaking, such as that of Halifu Osumare (2007), who observed that b-boys were able to synchronise their movements even though they had never met. She theorises that this is a consequence of the intercultural Africanist aesthetic. I propose that the b-boys are familiar with another style of dance, called rocking, and that they have learned this style from other dancers, possibly with the assistance of circulating videos. Attempts to preserve or claim traditional movements in dance and music, such as Osumare’s research, often downplay the significance of mediation. However, as in the account that follows, ethnomusicologists have recently highlighted the significance of recording technologies for the practices of folk music traditions (Keegan-Phipps forthcoming).

Since the early 1980s when movies popularised 'breakdancing' worldwide, breaking culture has been heavily mediated. Even during the years of unpopularity for the dance in North America, and its growth in popularity in emerging cultural hubs such as France, Japan and Canada, mediation played a significant role, through the circulation of underground or 'subcultural' videos (Fogarty 2006). These videos provided footage of events, dancers and dance moves, but they also drew from the film aesthetics of movies that were popular in breaking culture.

Early accounts of hip hop and its global migrations<sup>1</sup> document that many breakers were first exposed to the cultural practice through movies. In other words, many practitioners from the UK, Canada, etc. actually started at the same time as dancers in New York City, inspired by the mediated dance performances they saw on film or through their travels. Yet, those from New York City are attributed an authenticity that their counterparts in various other cities in the USA and overseas are not. Twenty-five years later, dancers in New York, who started in the early 1980s, are being given the authority to speak about the dance, as experts, to dancers in other countries (who often began at the same time). Mediation scholar, Georgina Born (2005), points out that many popular cultural practices began almost simultaneously in various countries, and thus it is hard to locate origins. In breaking culture, New York is considered the place of origin of the dance for most participants, although the exact boroughs are

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<sup>1</sup> See Mitchell (1996), Mitchell (2001), Condry (2001), Levy (2001), Pennay (2001), Kopytko (1986). Also, see Banes (1999) for a broader, historical argument about dance moves and their appropriations. She argues that calling particular dance styles 'hybrid' suggests that there are dance styles that are not hybrid forms. This is not accurate when the historical origins of set forms are contextualised.

often contested. However, none of the original participants of the earliest periods of the dance, as a vernacular form in the early 1970s, are teaching internationally. Most of the teachers began in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Likewise, there are participants in other countries that started in the same years. In London, England, for example Dolby D was one of the original b-boys there and is still dancing to this day.

### Mediated Influences

The influence of kung fu *films* on the aesthetics of hip hop culture is also significant, sociologically. As Pellerin (2003) writes:

The DJ's, MC's, B-boys and graffiti artists would go to see these films together, and it was a participatory experience ... After watching the movie, the B-boys would leave the theatre hyped off the energy they saw on the screen from movies like 'Mad Monkey Kung Fu', 'Mystery of the Chessboxing', 'Crippled Masters' and many more. After seeing martial arts on screen, they wanted to try it for themselves. (3)

Some of the early breaking moves, such as the windmill and headspin, were originally inspired by films being produced in the Hong Kong film industry<sup>2</sup> (Pellerin 2003). The kung fu scenes were choreographed, and involved elements of comedy that will emerge later in the subcultural videos by b-boys and b-girls.

Dance practices lead to a different way of thinking about the aesthetics of the moving image and, for dancers, this can often result in particular uses of

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<sup>2</sup><[http://koreanroc.com/zboard/zboard.php?id=document&page=1&sn1=&divpage=1&sn=off&ss=on&sc=on&select\\_arrange=headnum&desc=asc&no=104](http://koreanroc.com/zboard/zboard.php?id=document&page=1&sn1=&divpage=1&sn=off&ss=on&sc=on&select_arrange=headnum&desc=asc&no=104)> [Accessed August 22, 2010]

video technologies. In Germany and L.A., pioneering b-boys of the early 1980s describe the impact of the mainstream film, *Flashdance* (Lynne 1983) on their practice. They would sneak into the cinema for the 30 second clip of ‘street dancers’, and then meet up with rival crews outside the cinema and battle.

Another example, this time from a current online account by an Iranian b-boy, Justin Mashouf, reveals the significance of these popular movies:

Well b-boying came to Iran in the 80s similar to how it came to other parts of the world, through the film *Flash Dance*, and also through the film *Beatstreet*. With the movies and the music reaching Iran through the VHS tapes, people would share and flip around. Even my cousin, who’s in his late 30s, early 40s remembers breaking in high school, initially all during Iran-Iraq war, which was unfortunate that b-boying came to Iran in such an awful time in Iran’s history. American culture was definitely very restricted because of the political legacy between Iran and the US especially during the early days of the revolution. But now b-boying culture is really consumed and spread because of the Internet and cell phone videos.<sup>3</sup>

This account suggests that the centrality of videos for the dance practice should be considered historically. And this practice of circulating videotapes was about sharing at the local level with other practitioners.

In this chapter I argue that those with musical tastes *distinct* from the collective have been able to use video (mediation) as a way to perform their *individual* musical tastes. They do so on video in a way that they cannot do at battles, in cyphers or at formal competitions because DJs pick the music there. This means that videos made by dancers provide an important case study of mediation, and of music lovers.

Underground videos matter *internationally*. Their circulation both

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<sup>3</sup><[http://www.elanthemag.com/index.php/site/featured\\_articles\\_detail/international\\_b\\_boy\\_justin\\_mashouf-nid263444173/](http://www.elanthemag.com/index.php/site/featured_articles_detail/international_b_boy_justin_mashouf-nid263444173/)> [Accessed December 21, 2010]

developed and cultivated the sense of a shared history that accompanied the reminiscences of the past by touring and travelling b-boys and b-girls. The emergence of video, and the related resources of YouTube, Vimeo and other online sharing sites for clips, also involved the circulation of *musical* tastes. For example, as well as circulating images of dance moves and individual dancers, videos also introduced new music that became popularised collectively. This draws attention to the wider relevance of mediation for the phases of b-boy/b-girl aesthetics. Mediation is a broad theme including underground videos, promo(tional) YouTube clips, event videos, music videos, self-recording and finally even *face-to-face* mediation, as will be argued later.

Throughout the chapter, I will develop a framework for discussing videos within the context of breaking practice, including not only dance practice and video making but also circulation and reception practices. I will do so by providing examples of how crews and their extended families used video technologies. In the first section, this argument about musical tastes and mediation will be situated within the literature available from film and media studies. Finally, the argument that even face-to-face encounters within the culture are mediated, is made to emphasise the international influence of circulating materials that have shaped the aesthetics of the dance from its very beginnings.

#### Subcultural Videos and their Absence from Analysis

There has, to date, been no detailed analysis of subcultural videos of any

variety<sup>4</sup>. It is easy to see how this situation has come about. Film studies as a discipline has been most concerned with analysing films that are aesthetically innovative as film art (Bordwell and Thompson 1979). Documentary film studies and anthropology have provided detailed criteria for the often ethical debates surrounding documentary film practices (see Nichols 1991, 2001), focusing on both film aesthetics and issues of authenticity. Similar to my argument here, Helen Piper (2004) has demonstrated how the documentary focus on trueness to life does not provide an adequate criterion for the study of reality television, which has its own aesthetic and focuses on self-reflexive and amateur *performers*.

Performance studies have focused on areas often related to anthropology (Schechner 1988, 1993, 2002), but also to the theatre (Turner 1969, 1975, 1982), feminist and queer studies (see Trinh 1991, 1992; Butler 1990, 1993, 1997) and dance studies (Banes 1994). And although dance studies provided significant accounts of 'breakdancing' in the early 1980s, there has been little documentation about how breakers film themselves<sup>5</sup>. Filmmaker Rachel Raimists' recent suggestion, that for her next documentary film about hip hop culture she might give the dancers cameras to let them film themselves (Raimist in Basu and Harris 2006), echoes a popular sentiment in documentary film and

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<sup>4</sup> This includes skateboarding, rock climbing, and b-boy/b-girl videos. Iain Borden's (2001) reference to skate videos is a sole exception, brief but revealing. He argues that videos provide skateboarders with immediate feedback that alters their experience of themselves.

<sup>5</sup> Banes (1994) writes a short article reviewing the early movies of the 1980s for a public press publication and Schloss (2009) mentions the event videos only in passing on to an argument about the existence of a b-boy "canon" of songs, without considering how videos have influenced the international musical selections.

anthropological scholarship. This seems a bit outdated, however, considering that some of the dancers to whom she is referring have been making international event videos themselves for over ten years. These videos circulate the globe, and have a wide audience, but this fact remains unmentioned.

One of the initial studies of music videos was written by film studies' veteran E. Ann Kaplan (1987). In her work, she develops categories of videos, and this approach is inclined to categorise music video as a self-sufficient film genre. Andrew Goodwin (1993) critiqued Kaplan, among other film writers, for focusing on 'postmodern' theoretical readings of film texts, and in doing so, missing considerations relating to the music industry, and the function of the music soundtrack more generally<sup>6</sup>. Goodwin's consideration of music, the music industry and the exchange-value of videos, became the exemplary study on how to look at music videos in 'proper' context. In some ways, this shifted the debate of the phenomenon of music videos to broader absences in the analysis of film and sound in movies, only to be rectified by the few writers still focused on the music video as its own aesthetic genre (Vernallis 2004; Dodds 2004; Tan 2007).

One of the many aspects to take from Goodwin is the consideration of how music videos worked as part of popular music worlds. An area where consideration of music videos has continued to be brought up is that of rap videos, raised in correlation with issues of gender, sexuality and representation (although arguably these studies are more concerned with representation than

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<sup>6</sup> Film studies, as an academic discipline, was late to consider theoretically the impact of sound and music as integral parts of film-making and reception. This has been rectified with the contributions of Chion (1994, 1999, 2009), Gorbman (1987) and Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg (1993) work on music videos.



with research on the entertainment industry or on the decision-making processes of video makers). For those interested in popular music, this work was followed by very little in the way of music video analysis, most scholars returning to the study of popular music itself, under the premise that music videos had already been given more attention than the entertainment industry itself. In most accounts there is an absence of field research about the experiences, contexts and aesthetic considerations of dancers and choreographers working in this industry.

Sociological studies of youth have also been slow to deal with underground videos. Youth studies tend not to focus on the analysis of texts, *per se*, following the methodological imperatives of the social sciences involving interviews and surveys. This could also very well be a careful response to the overemphasis, established early on in the study of youth cultures, on work that lacked ethnographic rigour. At that time youth subcultures were seen to create lifestyles in opposition to mainstream, mass mediated co-options or the cultures of parents<sup>7</sup>. One of the key contributors to the Birmingham school, Dick Hebdige (1979) famously argued that the media co-opts subcultures.

Sarah Thornton's (1995) critique suggested that various forms of media are present at the onset of subcultural practices and she introduces categories of media including print-zines. *Video-zines*, however, are not mentioned. Sally Banes' early 1980s work about breaking is heavily invested in the Birmingham

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<sup>7</sup> See Bennett (2000, 2001), Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) and Bennett, Shank and Toynbee (2006) for updated accounts of the study of popular music and current engagements with the theorisations of the Birmingham school's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and the body of literature produced there.

School's ideology when she argued for a distinction between subcultural practices *before* and *after* media. She suggested that the major result of the mediation of breaking is the split between professional and amateur practitioners. This is a key insight that will crop up shortly. However, at this time, video equipment and editing facilities were still costly and home videos by b-boys and b-girls had not yet emerged. The way that mediation came to inform the culture aesthetically, quite early on, will be discussed in a later section.

Finally, post-subcultural critiques of the CCCS School dominated the 1990s and early 2000s<sup>8</sup>. Here issues of globalisation were beginning to be addressed, but mediation in dance was absent. As Thornton (1995), Schloss (2009) and others see it, dance is highly *unmediated*, unlike other forms of popular culture or, at least, there is an assumption that it needs to be experienced this way. Thus, videos of any kind are not central to their analysis.

The underground videos made by b-boys and b-girls are clearly distinguishable from both music videos and films. The videos they resemble most are skateboarding videos (a style of video with which more people are familiar). They also share qualities with the graffiti video magazines that began to circulate. In fact, some of the breaking videos also included black books of graffiti art, art on trains, emcees freestyling rap, and even bmxing or skateboarding footage. Some of the key stylistic traits of these videos include structures organized around musical soundtracks of popular music, video footage of best performances alongside outtakes of the worst 'crashes' or

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<sup>8</sup> See Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003), Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004), and Huq (2006).

'horseplay' amongst friends.

In dance practice, breaking videos reveal the extent of the negotiations between collective tastes and individual musical taste preferences. They emphasise the aesthetic choices of individuals when not explicitly constrained by the collective and the DJs. Some of these choices move beyond musical tastes, and their reflections in dance practice, fashion and identity performance, into iconographies imported from other mediations, such as kung fu films or video games. These imported iconographies shape the b-boy aesthetic as well, and tie the practice not to 'folk traditions', as American scholars argue, in the hope that the available, yet limited, cultural funding channels will support breaking as an art form, but rather to a landscape of popular cultural practices related to art and commerce simultaneously, while embedded in known subcultural codes and conventions, similar to skateboarding, BMXing and local band practices.

### Underground Videos

This section focuses on the aesthetic choices and creative practices of street dancers who have turned into video makers. Furthermore, it queries where aesthetic appreciation can be found at the level of the distribution or circulation of breaking videos, as well as considering the implications of these videos for film aesthetics and popular music analysis.

In the 1990s, with the emergence of the Internet as a popular medium for the general public, many crews on the West Coast of the United States, with Silicone Valley nearby, were the first to have the necessary skills and resources to take advantage of this new potential. They used it to make a name for

themselves, build websites, sell videos online and to dominate the discourse about breaking. For example, members of Style Elements crew were among the first American crews to submit a video to Battle of the Year, Germany, to perform in 1997. They also created their own underground videos of their crew during this time, with titles such as, “Monster Squad” and plenty of references to kung fu film aesthetics and video games<sup>9</sup>.

In a write-up online, self-promoting their crew, Style Elements (or Stylelements as they are often referred to), sum up their credentials in a way that suggests the ‘art’ of what they do, alongside commercial work and other achievements:

The Style Elements Crew was created in the year of 1995 and have made an immense impact in the bboy culture internationally. Each of the crew members has individually inspired bboys around the world with their creativity, originality, and passion in their art form. However, together they brought the style of breaking into another level with their intricate and precise dance routines, which have become a commonly used and often necessary dance form in winning crew competitions. The Style Elements crew originated from the Stockton and Modesto areas of Northern California. Since then they have become one of the most well-known and respected crews today. In just the first 10 years of existence Style Elements had already won over 50 1st place titles through worldwide bboy competitions. They have also expanded their influence by winning the most coveted international competitions. Such as UK Bboy Championships, Battle Of The Year Germany and Freestyle Session World Finals just to name a few. After making an impact in the Bboy world. Style Elements craved more and desired to broaden their horizons in the entertainment industry. Since moving to Los Angeles, crew members have appeared in a plethora of commercials, movies, and music videos. Commercials include Ipod, Jolly Ranchers, Coke, Volkswagon and Skechers

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<sup>9</sup> See introductory remarks by Remind from Stylelements crew in a video called *Ka Ka Poo Poo Porcupine Pubic Hairs* that have been made available on YouTube here: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3CuuJrvY5I&feature=related>> [Accessed August 21, 2010]

while movies include 2 Fast 2 Furious. All for Nothing, You Got Served and Step Up 2. Style Elements have also danced during the halftime show of the NBA All-Star Games in Los Angeles. Crew members have also gone on tour and served as assistant choreographers for major music artists, including Justin Timberlake, Gwen Stefani, Black Eyed Peas, Christina Aguilera, and Missy Elliot. Currently, three members of Style Elements have achieved the rare opportunity to be used as characters in a new Sony Playstation game dubbed "Bboy".<sup>10</sup>

Their creation of underground videos is not mentioned here as an achievement, although their MySpace page provides links to their videos. The videos serve as promotional tools for the crew. They are not organised as solicited attempts to be recognised for their 'artistic' value as films.

In 1997, Style Elements crew made a huge impact in their appearance at the BOTY competition, when they opened their showcase to the music of Metallica, wearing costumes replicating the film, *Dead Presidents*. Their innovations in dance moves were heralded in the b-boy/b-girl scene, and surely one aspect that made them seem fresh was their choice of music, which was eclectic and contemporary. They were also known for putting underground west coast rap in their crew or solo videos, because that is the music that they enjoyed. In the United States, their challenge to the Rocksteady crew at the B-boy Summit 3 event was significant<sup>11</sup>, and their appearance at Battle of the Year made them well known in Europe.

However, it was also through the event videos that their name was circulated, and this made it possible for them to make and sell their own crew

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<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.myspace.com/styleelementscrew>> [Accessed August 21, 2010]

Read more: <http://www.myspace.com/styleelementscrew#ixzz0xFLFIITe>

<sup>11</sup> Some of the B-Boy Summit 3 event footage, from the event video, is now available on YouTube: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfaenagurCI&feature=search>> [Accessed August 21, 2010]

videos. These further showcased their signature moves, crew aesthetics and horseplay. Their videos borrowed significantly from skateboarding videos. The conventions of these videos involved the association of particular musical tastes with the individual identities of participants; in how they self-represent their style and finesse. The crew dynamics involving horseplay and pranks between top performers are also reminiscent of skateboarding video aesthetics. For example, in skateboarding videos, the musical soundtrack does not need to align in particular ways with the movement for artistic purposes, and one of the amusing parts of early skateboarding videos was the way cuts in editing coincided precisely with the music. However, in the production of breaking videos, matching music to movement becomes absolutely central. One dancer who produced a video in the early 2000s explained to me that it took quite a while for him to match the edited dance clips with the music he had chosen. However, his friend, also featured on the video, found it much easier. He chose tracks he liked and they seemed to link perfectly with his dancing the very first time it was synched. His friend had shot a lot of outdoor footage, often listening to similar music to the music track chosen, whereas he had been in clubs listening to a style of music really different from the track he ended up choosing, although he likes all the music he had danced to.

In 1999, another crew from the West Coast (Seattle), Circle of Fire, made available their crew video called, "A Journey Through the Circle." This crew video showed how the members of the crew lived together in a house with a room devoted to dance practice. They explained their crew dynamic, explicitly. For example, one of the dancers described how each member came with their

own influences, and dance styles, and that they came together to build their meaning collectively. They were clearly influenced by outside developments such as capoeira, house dance, all-terrain breaking (breaking outside), freestyle and new school hip hop. One of the crew members explained:

When we all got together. We all took what we gained from the areas we grew up in, and kind of shared it with each other but it didn't stop there. And we've kind of consciously made an effort to evolve our dance even further, and take what we've known and learned and then take it to the next level and evolve it into something whole new. (*A Journey Through the Circle*, n.d.)

The music that they selected for their video also shows a range of influences that are not all straight instrumental break beats, and include selections such as Eddie Kendrick's, "Date with the Rain." Although each of the dancers is introduced and showcased by name, the musical tracks selected to accompany the edited dance clips of their performances are compiled in such a way that one song covers the performances of many crew members.

Later on, David "Elsewhere" Bernal, an experimental street dancer would become one of the first viral video Internet celebrities. A clip of him dancing in a Korean-American talent contest in Los Angeles was copied, multiplied and reproduced by spectators at length. Now Bernal is featured on iPod and Volkswagen commercials, breaking videos (including an incredibly popular one that he made himself) and in live performances. These commercials are signs of success in breaking. When Bernal was asked how he got into practising dance in his bedroom daily, he answered:

I was pretty much dancing non-stop. I think I had a job, but it was pretty much job and then straight home to practice. I was really motivated to be a good dancer. I had seen this one video at a friend's house. It had this one dancer, this Asian guy with a blue

windbreaker. He was at a contest and was, by far, the most talented dancer there. He really struck a chord with me and influenced by dancing. He was sort of the basis for my style in the very beginning. Then I pretty much ... it's kind of whacked, but I copied what he had<sup>12</sup>.

I found this a fascinating remark since it shows that, not only did David copy the moves of other dancers as part of his process of learning, but also that video played an integral role in inspiring his dance.

On a related note, in Scotland, a younger b-boy admitted to me in an interview that he first learned breaking from playing a PlayStation Game called *B-boy*, and he defended his access to the culture through this mediation. He said that some people would judge him for admitting that, but that it was the only exposure he had had to the dance in the beginning, before he met people. He had lived in a 'remote' area, removed from hip hop culture.

*Detours: An Experimental Dance Collaboration* (2000), the underground video that Bernal created featured himself, Kujo from L.A., Midus and Rawbzilla. In the individual sections of the video devoted to each of the featured dancers, they include other dancers who have influenced or inspired them. One of the dancers featured explained to me that *each dancer picked the musical tracks for their section of the video*. For one dancer, after the footage was edited together, he picked a song and conveniently the song matched the movements perfectly, requiring no tweaking of image to sound. The footage of the other dancers had to be lined up carefully to suit the musical tracks selected. An introduction to the four dancers highlights their ethos of, "a road less travelled" and "originality

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<sup>12</sup> From "On the Dance Floor" online article for *Open Your Eyes Magazine*.  
<<http://www.oyemag.com/elsewhere.html>> [Accessed June 24, 2008]



stands alone”, as each dancer walks towards a solitary space in the urban environment to begin performing. This is also foregrounded in the vocal track, and extra non-diegetic interview quotations that are added to the piece<sup>13</sup>.

Some broad analysis of the dancers’ video making is relevant here. First, in sociological terms these videos are interesting because of the tight relationship between the makers and users of the videos: they are often the same people - the dancers who are the purpose of the video - what it's about; what it's for. Second, I think the aesthetic decisions associated with them: how the video is shot and edited, what music is chosen and why, and how it is used and reused, are just as interesting a basis for an aesthetic theory as Kantian detachment<sup>14</sup>. The concept of 'dancing' to music on video thus becomes the model of an aesthetic argument concerning sound and space and time, and for this I will later on briefly introduce ideas about aesthetics and movement from Ludwig Wittgenstein's (2007) lecture notes.

### Promotional YouTube Clips

In recent years, new theorisations about mediation have emerged in a variety of disciplines: music, film, new media, communications, and performance studies. Especially at the intersection of popular music and performance studies, the question that has arisen most often is: what is the difference between live and mediated performances? (Auslander 1999) Often

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<sup>13</sup> See the video online here: <<http://vimeo.com/2894000>> [Accessed August 21, 2010]  
Or here: <<http://www.bboyworld.com/forum/other-dance-influences/90851-detours-feat-kujo-elsewhere-rawbzilla-midus.html>> [Accessed August 21, 2010]

<sup>14</sup> See Malbon 1999 for an account of the pleasure of clubbing from a perspective informed by Kant and Nietzsche.

the liveliest considerations include a discussion of the ideological assumptions about authenticity that are made in relation to both the 'live' performance and the 'mediated' one. Scholars often theorise along this dichotomy (see Auslander 1999) yet the ideological notions of the authentic 'live' performance in music spectatorship are displaced in the mediation that occurs in breaking videos.

The videos are embedded with ideological discourses about lifestyle 'realness', in part because the videos are set up to capture the lifestyle practices and pranks that accompany the live performance. The every day work of dance is diffused by the familial type of bonding that close groups of friends, who practice together, perform for the camera. The 'backstage' crew dynamics offer a glimpse into masculine sociability and group formations<sup>15</sup>. However, their authenticity is not so much built on accurate documentation of live battles against opponents, so much as on the expression of the participants in an environment of their choosing, to their own musical soundscape.

Edits give the illusion of a continuous 'best' live performance, and this is a privilege not granted to the pop singer who lip syncs to a best recorded performance (while simultaneously giving a live performance of dance in many cases). These observations lead to questions for future studies: how do performers *use* videos as part of their creative practice? How do videos capture new performances (and performance settings)? How does the music line-up? I will set up some of the frames of reference for this in what follows.

The directorial decisions made in these underground videos include

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<sup>15</sup> See Wheaton and Beal (2008) for a critique and analysis of masculinity in skateboarding culture. B-boying/b-girling is similar, although the dynamic range of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds would require further insight and analysis.

three key areas. The first concerns musical choices. These include what music to add as a non-diegetic soundtrack, and when to cut from one shot to another in the editing. Often in early skateboarding films the film images are cut to match beats in the music, to almost comic or irritating effect. The second area for directorial decision-making concerns live performance choices. These include choosing the best performances of particular moves or execution, regardless of backdrop. And the third area concerns choices of space and place. These involve choosing to dancing in a spectacular space that sets a particular tone, whether this is a supermarket aisle, beside the shadow of a skyscraper, or in the midst of a busy sidewalk.

The overriding decision in production involves capturing the best performance, and the best performance sometimes involves the execution of moves, and sometimes involves live events where the dancer has synchronised moves to the *music* that is playing in an immaculate, overall performance. Music, that is, which is picked by the DJ for the night, and is therefore an unplanned variable of the performance that the dancer does not control. In documentation, then, music of the live event is a variable, and music added non-diegetically is chosen, but does not represent what the dancer was listening to at the time of performance.

One of the main objectives of filming is capturing the movement of the dancers. The musical soundtrack that is added, non-diegetically, is also made to match the movement of the dancers. Sometimes in a promotional video for a performer, the music fades out from the non-diegetic music recording (the common practice) and features the diegetic, live *but also recorded* music, i.e. the

music that was playing during the actual dance competition. When this happens, the purpose is to feature how well the dancer executed their moves to the music. This is clearly demonstrated in a promotional video for a b-girl called “Abgirl” from New Jersey:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cfw0-uYQsJA>>

Structurally, there is a moment in this promotional video when the non-diegetic music fades out and we see Abgirl perform to the music playing at the battle, and hitting all the beats with power moves. The crowd response to this performance is also heard.

This is a recent convention that b-boys and b-girls have begun to include in their promotional videos. In response to the observation that a musical track added later on does not reveal how good the dancer is at hitting the beats of the diegetic music being played at the time of performance, yet struck with the need also to express individual musical taste and provide a coherent soundscape for a collection of edited clips, dancers and film editors have begun to integrate a moment in the musical soundtrack to showcase the diegetic sound. This foregrounds the ability of the dancers to hit beats in the music, a detail necessary for the aesthetic criteria valued by the collective b-boy/b-girl community.

## Reception

I have focused on the musical choices made during the production of the videos, but the reception of videos also involves aesthetic evaluations about the music selected. For this thesis, I will make only one brief comment about

reception, as this relates to the wider discussion of musical tastes and dance practice on which I remain focused.

Questions about music tracks dominate the comments below YouTube clips. Borrowing from skate culture as an example, on “Bam Margera Best Skate Video”<sup>16</sup> comments range from, “what’s the song” to “music is shit.” Likewise, on Elsewhere’s dance clip<sup>17</sup>, comments range from, “where can I get this version of this song?” to, “he always dances to the best tunes...autechre... kraftwerk...he’s amazing.” In this last example, there is evidence that the dancer is also being evaluated *in terms of their musical taste*.

#### Circulation of Videos

Kujo explained that he first saw dancers from Toronto featured on a video that his friend showed him. The video was, “a copy of a copy of a copy” (Fogarty 2006). This observation raises exciting questions about circulation. What does the circulation and repetition of video viewing say about aesthetic appreciation in practice, by practitioners? To answer this, the question can be reformulated around two themes. One is the significance of movement to our understanding of vitality and dynamics (see Stern 2010) and in the passage below I relate philosophical ideas about movement to music. The second is the significance of repetition for aesthetic appreciation, and here technology provides means for repeat viewings of dynamic movement.

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<sup>16</sup> Added on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and had 2,185,662 views by date accessed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Added May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and viewed 597,752 times by date accessed March 5<sup>th</sup> 2008.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein writes: “If I could dance to the music, that would be my best way of expressing just *how* the refrain moves me. Certainly there couldn’t be any better expression than that.”<sup>18</sup> (And that is how he will communicate his aesthetic preference). Wittgenstein (1980b) also wrote that if he grinds his teeth he could hear the music he imagines in his head better:

When I imagine a piece of music, something I do every day & often, I 'always I think' rhythmically grind my upper & lower front teeth together. I have noticed it before but usually it takes place quite unconsciously. Moreover it's as though the notes in my imagination were produced by the movement. I think this way of hearing music in the imagination may be very common. I can of course also imagine music without moving my teeth, but then the notes are much more blurred, much less clear, less pronounced. (32)

Both comments are considering the way music is experienced in the imagination, and both relate this to a precision of human movement. These comments by Wittgenstein, structured by considerations of aesthetic theory, offer a phenomenological contemplation that is worth relating to this unlikely comparison. In b-boy/b-girl culture, where music is almost always a part of the experience of dancers, either in practice or performance, the music to come in the song may be projected in the imagination, as movements are organised quickly to match beats. This aspect of the work of dance, the imagining of movement and music as correlated entities, is fine tuned with video editing. In other words, video editing affords the relationship of music and dance new configurations and possibilities. The evaluation of these videos, and now promotional clips, online suggests that b-boys and b-girls are assessing not only skills, but also musical tastes, and this is significantly different to the considerations of aesthetics on film to date.

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<sup>18</sup> see Goehr (2005, 321).

Wittgenstein (2007) also suggests that most of our aesthetic preferences are not spoken about but are found in our repetitive actions and gestures. For film this might mean, for example, how many times one watches a film, the way one may dress like our favourite character from a movie, or how often one listens to the music from a soundtrack; how one might pause to concentrate when a song is heard. Aesthetic meaning can also be found in the, “copy of a copy of a copy.” In other words, in how many times a video is circulated and why, or in how many hits a YouTube clip about a high school dance contest receives. It is evident in how intimately one knows a single track, and in what a favourite musical track may say about an individual’s taste. And although this seems to be a qualitative or perhaps individualistic sentiment about musical taste, the implications are significant. When the videos are watched over and over, the spectator becomes familiar with the sounds and this often feeds back into that spectator’s practice, as evidenced in the interview material in this thesis. In other words, I am finding that the musical tracks featured on these videos have become the canonical texts in various countries for constructing the agreed upon understanding of the history of the dance.

Although repetition in dance performances can lead to diminishing effects, dancers use videos to learn dance as well as to watch it, to learn about music and, finally, to judge the videomaker’s ability to understand and reflect the integral dynamic found in the *relationship between* dance and music (i.e. movement and listening). This judgement extends to the video maker’s ability to connect these experiences for spectator pleasure, for musical taste circulation and for the acquisition of new skills in leisure practices related to popular

culture.

Examined from the other side, top performers often try not to watch videos of other dancers too much, as they do not want to be informed or influenced unconsciously by the movements of others. I cannot address this articulation in full in this thesis, as this would require an entirely different form of investigation with, I would imagine, quite stimulating results likely in the area of neuroscience and movement.

Because videos circulated originally from hand to hand, copy to copy, then through indie skate shops and hip hop shops, and then finally through the many hip hop stores online, the underground videos are attached to notions of authenticity in this lifestyle culture. It is an unusual mix of commerce and art, similar to the rock ideology identified by Simon Frith (1983). Videos now have sponsorship logos at the beginning. Dancers are endorsed and sponsored by major corporations and companies, as well as by independent lifestyle companies. The fact that the clothes the dancers wear are by Nike or Adidas is treated as coincidental, or as a part of surviving as practitioners of their lifestyle and art. The reason b-boys and b-girls are sponsored by large companies is that the companies see them as tastemakers, and part of this assumes that their image will have widespread circulation (cf. Klein 2000). The videos are treated as authentic, however, when they first circulated, dancers who took ideas from them; ideas markedly different from trends in their local street dance culture, were, ironically, considered the most inauthentic to other dancers.

These performance videos, located outside of the conventional film canon, encourage a new set of questions about video circulation, musical taste



and spectacular performances as addressed earlier. As institutionalised products, the videos also provide a necessary venue for establishing reputations for practitioners. They provide little income because of the cost of production and shipping, minus the pirating costs, according to the dancers that I interviewed. However, they do offer up an opportunity for self promotion which can lead to invitations to perform around the world.

Underground videos can thus be seen to play an influential and significant role in lifestyle or breaking practices more specifically. They circulate everything from new moves, musical tastes, fashion, archival documents of performances, news about event outcomes, to injuries, crew affiliations and best performances. Boutros and Straw (2010) suggest that *circulation* as a theoretical model can encompass more than merely the delivery of goods to various locales through specific pathways. They can account for the ‘cultural resonances’ of cultural artefacts as they move through space. In this case study, the cultural resonances of breaking videos involve shifts in musical tastes, trends and shifts in the dance as time progresses and more participants get involved in various locales around the world.

Musical taste is attached to underground videos in complicated ways. International b-boy competitor from Toronto, Karl “Dyzee” Alba explained that in Toronto people danced to a wide variety of music, popular at the time, and did not necessarily associate breaking with a particular type of music. Bag of Trix crew, in the early 1990s, developed many of their styles out of trends in hip hop styles contemporary to club cultures, coming out of the rap that they enjoyed and heard out at clubs (rather than funk music). When they brought

their moves to the floor, they incorporated a lot of steps from other hip hop dances, and that can be seen in their style.

Videos also build reputations. A dancer from Montreal felt validated by her appearance on a video from an event in Miami that she had attended. In an interview, she described how she must have been good and valued by others to appear on a compilation video of highlights for a major international event. From this example, the establishment of credentials is tied into both a performance at a live event, and the mediated representation of that event which followed.

Underground videos are unlike dancers' participation in music videos because they *elicit* musical tastes. Jacob "Kujo" Lyons, was featured in the "It's like that" RUN-D.M.C. remix music video of the late 1990s. This video is often cited as one of the key cultural texts in the come-back of breaking in North America and thus a key text. The song first appeared in 1983 in a version by RUN-D.M.C. However, the version cited is the 1997 remix of the song by Jason Nevins.<sup>19</sup> This song had a video featuring 'breakdancers' battling each other in a car park – girls against guys.<sup>20</sup> Around this time, breaking experienced a renaissance in North America (Fogarty 2006) although the dance had been kept

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<sup>19</sup> Conversation between a b-boy and myself in Edinburgh, 2008, although the exact phrasing has been modified. The song being referred to is RUN DMC vs. Jason Nevins "It's Like That." A late 1990s music video rendition of this song features b-boys (including Jacob 'Kujo' Lyons) battling b-girls (including Asia One and Medusa). This music video is often cited as a major component in the return of b-boying/b-girling to the North American public's attention.

<sup>20</sup> See the video here: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsBfPhtSWl8>> [Accessed June 5, 2010]

alive vibrantly in ‘underground’ North American hip hop scenes, as well as in Europe and Japan.

I am going to say a bit more about Kujo’s intentions to demonstrate the complexity of this mediated history for participants, and where the fault lines of musical mediation occur at a closer view. Kujo recalled working on the music video and his intentions:

Airtracks [a move in breaking] are really difficult. I wanted to make a point in 1997 of doing it in a music video that I knew would be seen around the world – well I didn’t know that yet that it would be seen in Germany but I wanted to show the Germans that they weren’t the only ones ... that they didn’t have a monopoly on that move you know, even though there were only a couple people in the country that could do it um still that it came from that area, we ‘knew’ of course after that time I learned that there were people that were doing it before that in America, in New York and L.A we found that out later but we never saw footage of that but the first footage anyone ever saw was of people in Germany doing airtracks, ... so I wanted to prove that point to the Germans I knew it would be seen all over the world and that made history because that helped to show the rest of the world that that move was possible and not only possible but combinable, you could do all sorts of interesting things with it and not just the move by itself. And it inspired many people - quite a lot of people have come up and told me that I’m the reason they started breakdancing because they saw that video. That was one.

None of Kujo’s intentions for participating in the music video have to do with his own personal musical tastes. However, he was hoping at the time of his participation to prove a point to German dancers, such as Storm’s crew Battle Squad. He knew about the moves that the Germans had because he had seen footage of the dancers there that had been circulating in L.A. where he lives. After appearing in the music video, Kujo was invited over to Germany to battle.

I have drawn attention to a couple of key features and considerations in

the analysis of underground videos so far. First, these videos are popular, both amongst practitioners and the general public. Second, the relationship between videomaking practices and musical taste emphasises distinct aesthetic criteria for the judging of these underground videos. Often the best performance is related to the diegetic music soundtrack. For spectators watching these videos, they are influential for the way that people learn dances, share information about music and learn music intimately. The repeated viewings of clips mean that people are learning the music well; repetition is a way of noticing and memorising detail. Finally, this repetition and copying practice demonstrates a key element of our aesthetic appreciation of film and music that is often overlooked.

#### Self-recording and the Immediacy of Feedback

There has been little to no attention paid to subcultural videos featuring surfing, skateboarding, BMXing, rock climbing or breaking, though Iain Borden (2000) suggests that videos allow skateboarders to watch *themselves*. Dancers use self-recording in training or practices, in the construction of choreography for stage performances, to record and analyse their performances in battles, to 'bite' moves of other dancers and to express and explain their lifestyle and aesthetic choices.

Some well-known b-boys and b-girls described how they use video to archive different moves and to connect together ideas they have for sequences of moves. This helps them to create combinations later on that they cannot use momentarily. Also, in practices, b-boys and b-girls often video their attempts to

get moves, on their phones. This is mainly for the purpose of seeing what they are doing wrong. In a windmill, for example, they can see when their legs are not straight or not spread apart enough.

The immediacy of feedback and the accessibility of technology have also changed the interactions of b-boys and b-girls at events. It is common now to see b-boys and b-girls replaying the footage from a battle they were just in, to see how they did from 'outside' of their experiences. B-girl Firefly explained to me that she only really gets to enjoy her performances in battles by watching the video. In the moment, she is too busy concentrating on what comes in the next round. Having won a major international, one on one competition, Firefly is a top performer who often uses videos in her daily training to acquiesce new moves.

Recently, some well-known b-boys joked to each other right after a showcase battle that the battle was already up on YouTube. This immediacy has changed the elements of surprise and the control of reputations that b-boys were able to have in the past when they travelled. Video footage was not as readily available then. Also in many cases, the well-known b-boys would not have the footage of their own performances or have access to it, in some cases not even realising how far the images of themselves were circulating. This was the case even earlier on, when Gizmo was surprised in the 1990s that Japanese b-boys, visiting New York City, recognised his face and introduced themselves, in awe of his abilities.

## Face-to-Face Mediation

Umberto Eco (1994) has offered some interesting observations on the mediated experience of face-to-face encounters with a celebrity, in an article called, "How to React to Familiar Faces." He begins the story:

A few months ago, as I was strolling in New York, I saw, at a distance, a man I knew very well heading in my direction. The trouble was that I couldn't remember his name or where I had met him. This is one of those sensations you encounter especially when, in a foreign city, you run into someone you met back home, or vice versa. A face out of context creates confusion. Still the face was so familiar that, I felt, I should certainly stop, greet him, converse ...

We were now only a few feet from each other, I was just about to break into a broad, radiant smile, when suddenly I recognized him. It was Anthony Quinn. Naturally, I had never met him in my life, nor he me. In a thousandth of a second I was able to check myself, and I walked past him, my eyes staring into space.

The observations that Eco makes next are telling. He reflects on his inclinations to say hello to people he sees face-to-face whom he has never met, but has seen on screen:

These faces inhabit our memory; watching the screen, we spend so many hours with them that they are as familiar to us as our relatives', even more so. You can be a student of mass communication, debate the effects of reality, or the confusion between the real and the imagined, and expound the way some people fall permanently into this confusion; but still you are not immune to the syndrome (40).

When people come across famous faces, Eco argues, they behave quite differently than they would with someone they know. They can talk about someone near them, "Look, there's X" (41) and not even mind that the person overhears them. Finally, Eco argues that ,

The mass media first convinced us that the imaginary was real, and now they are convincing us that the real is imaginary; and the

more reality the TV screen shows us, the more cinematic our everyday world becomes (41).

Dancers in L.A. first saw dancers from Toronto and New York City on underground videos and vice versa. Now of course this is complicated; Crazy Legs came through Toronto, filmed a battle between Bag of Trix and Intrikit, and brought the video out to the West Coast of the States where he sold it to dancers from Style Elements, for example. So here is a case where some of the dance experiences were face-to-face (i.e. Crazy Legs visiting different cities) and some of the experiences were unquestionably mediated, such as dancers seeing other dancers first on video (but then later, often meeting up in 'live' encounters). Dyzee, from Toronto, pointed out that when he first saw b-boys, live, whom he had only seen before on event videos, they were like celebrities to him (Fogarty 2006). My argument here is that even face-to-face encounters can be mediated, and that subcultural video making has this impact in a close-knit, if internationally scattered culture.

Local b-boys in various cities, meeting Crazy Legs, do not treat the face-to-face experience of him in the way of a 'normal' face-to-face encounter. B-boys that meet Ken Swift have said, as they walked away from the encounter, things like, "I can't believe I was just hanging out with Ken Swift!", or they tell influential b-boys and b-girls how inspirational they have been for their development as dancers. In fact, an old school rocker from New York City recently joked to me about this: "I'm a real person, you know." Dancers that come up to these famous b-boys and b-girls want to: A) just talk to them, which would be in their eyes an important experience in their dancing life, B) get their

photo taken with them, C) ask them questions about the history of the dance, gossip about other key dancers, or enquire about who their affiliations are with, etc.

Why are these face-to-face encounters with particular dancers mediated experiences? (Besides the obvious aspects of the encounters, such as pictures or video clips taken – recently a b-boy requested a shout out from some famous b-boys on his camera phone.) First, the very fact that particular dancers are well known, through many generations of dancers, over decades, and across countries is largely due to mediation. Also, the argument that breaking or dance practice in general, is unmediated and that you, “have to be there”, precludes from the scene a lot of poorer dancers who cannot afford to travel to international events and meet all the famous dancers, and take master workshop classes. For example, some of the early ‘80s Turkish b-boys in Berlin explained that they only met some of the well-known American dancers during the 1990s when they toured Germany. They did not travel extensively and yet performed to the highest level they could locally. At that time, b-boys and b-girls were not able to make a living out of the dance as they are able to now.

#### Technological Mediations

Dancers’ names also become touchstones for conversation and knowledge, and begin to serve as benchmarks for knowledge, often because the dancers were well known through the movies about the dance from the early ‘80s that first interested many young people in learning the forms. In other words, well known b-boys experience being treated as mediated personas, and



their names often mediate conversations between b-boys and b-girls from different places.

This mediation of performance that proliferates the culture has changed the game. However, as I mentioned in the beginning, mediation has also been there from the very early origins of the culture. B-boys were influenced by Chinese kung fu films, and by the choreographed routines of performers such as Bruce Lee. When it came to thinking of the dance as an 'art form,' b-boys such as Ken Swift turned to Bruce Lee for inspiration, and many debates within the culture stemmed from b-boys reading Bruce Lee's book and trying to apply the principles and theories to their dance practice. Bruce Lee spoke about the meaning of 'art' and 'discipline,' but had surprisingly little to say about how mediation affected or informed his practice.

One of the broader ways to consider breaking is in the context of a larger music history, where breaking itself has only been made possible through the invention and commercialisation of musical recordings. A comparison with salsa is useful here. Lise Waxer (2002) pointed out that whole musical and dance cultures are built around appreciations of records in Cali, Colombia. Waxer retells the story of a famous recording artist, musician, who comes to Cali for the first time to perform. He is an old man and has forgotten the lyrics to his song. The audience sings back every word and he is touched and overwhelmed by this appreciation. This is another example of face-to-face mediation, where someone did not realise that he had a whole community of fans who love his music, in a country far away from his touring spots of the past. Recordings have made this possible.

The b-boys and b-girls, as I have mentioned, are different sorts of fans. They may only love a particular moment in a song, or a particular song like, “The Mexican” by Babe Ruth. When the performers see this whole new fan base that knows every word, they quickly realise that they only know every word of *one* of their songs. Video mediation has a role to play in this, as do the conventions of DJ culture, where albums are not played in full at clubs or parties; only individual songs or breaks.

In this chapter, I have identified some of the key ways that mediation, in the form of underground videos, became a way for crews to explain and present their aesthetic combinations and way of life. This form of mediation also gave individual b-boys and b-girls an opportunity to express, experiment with and perform their individual musical tastes, and preferences for particular music recordings, through the creation of subcultural videos. With the rise of the Internet, the forum changed as promotional video clips became shorter and available on sites such as YouTube, and event battles began to appear online, instantaneously. Now b-boys and b-girls can quickly, or choose not to watch other dancers to avoid being influenced. B-boys and b-girls also become ‘celebrities’ through mediation, not knowing people that know them, and knowing themselves differently through being able to watch their performances from an ‘outside’ perspective.



## **Section IV: Criteria for Judgement**



## Chapter 10: International Competitions

Criteria for judgement can now be discussed. Matters of taste and aesthetics that underpin breaking culture come into focus in one area where judgement is explicit: international b-boy/b-girl competitions. These are events where the reputations of dancers are also established and tested. Building a reputation and accruing status in the hierarchies of international breaking culture are complex activities. There are the typical tensions, familiar to other musical worlds, such as the necessity for participants to be not only talented but also reliable and professional. Also, there is an uneven distribution of resources (Lull 1995). In breaking, the significance of one's crew, or larger affiliations, are also central to issues of reputation and these are matters I will address at large in this chapter.

One aspect of breaking culture that is unique, in comparison with many other musical and art worlds, is how closely reputation is tied to formalisations of judgement. Those who are asked to judge events must not only be good dancers, but must also have had this verified through winning events themselves. This is a development that has taken place gradually over the history of breaking, as internationally practised.

Although competition is a feature of many other art and music worlds (Becker 1982), its significance and centrality to the meaning of this dance has the result that the ties between authority, authenticity, performance and judgement are bound quite strongly.

One aspect of reputation that becomes relevant here is the history of performance by individuals, which needs to be maintained and refreshed constantly. It is here that the significance of mediation will become apparent. With enough investigation, anyone can learn about the discourses that surround breaking culture. However this is one world where the only authority that truly counts is that gained on the dance floor: the *work* of the dance is valued above all else. Having said that, in this chapter I explore how event organisers and DJs shape the aesthetics of the dance and how, in doing so, they have impacted on various offshoots of the dance, including formal competitions.

For Storm, breaking competitions are about comparison. This has to be made easy for the judges. B-boys and b-girls have to demonstrate that they can do what their opponents can do, plus more. Storm is one of the key b-boys who have helped different events to structure their judging systems. One of the events he has been involved with is Battle of the Year, which I discuss in the first section. In the following section, I briefly review some of the developments that have taken place in judging, and I end with some analysis of a day of field research at Hip Opsession, an annual, international b-boy battle in Nantes, France.

#### Battle Of The Year (BOTY)

“... and tonight you’re gonna see some breaking and some rapping and some breaking and some scratching and some breaking and some popping and some breaking and some locking and some breaking and some graffiti and some breaking and then you’re gonna see some more breaking ...” (MC Trix introducing *Battle of the Year*)

Thomas Hergenröther is the head organiser of the largest and longest running annual international b-boy event, held in Germany, Battle of the Year<sup>1</sup>. This event began on a small scale in 1990 and now has grown in spectatorship, with at least 6,000 people a year in attendance. One year Thomas aimed to have 10,000 there and achieved his goal. Although this was a bigger event, part of the discourse aimed to claim authenticity, and this was actually possible for several reasons. First of all, Thomas was a b-boy who had a crew that helped to organise the event when it first began. In Germany, this was significant because it set the event apart from events organised by social workers, which were stigmatised by b-boys at that time. Also, reputable b-boys and b-girls have performed at the event or have judged at the event in the past.

Battle of the Year is structured so that each crew first does a showcase round that has to be prepared in advance, including selecting and mixing their own music and sound (which can involve a DJ's help). This is not the typical structure for breaking battles, but Thomas has described how the showcase round provides b-boys and b-girls with the structure, regulations and deadline to construct a show that they can then perform for money elsewhere. The judges then select the top four crews to compete. Two crews compete for third and fourth place and the other selected crews for first and second place. This battle structure is the convention for breaking events.

How is the event judged? When Battle of the Year happens, the first showcase round is a theatrical show which crews have to prepare to be able to

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<sup>1</sup> This international event has since moved to Montpellier France under new organisers and the estimated turn out for 2010 was 12,000 people.



secure a spot in the finals to battle another crew. This is really interesting in the context of this research because the dancers pick the music for this performance round, so the shows over the years provide a document of what musical tastes different dancers have had at different periods. Crews are judged on theatrical elements of the show such as synchronicity, stage presence, theme, music and choreography, as well as on their toprock/uprock, footwork/legwork, freezes, and power moves.

Although I will address the Internet and event webpages in more detail in the next chapter, I would like to include here a quotation from the BOTY webpage that demonstrates the event's claim to authenticity:

Yes we have our BOTY products we sell and yes of course we have some (authentic) sponsors who help us but this does not mean that the organizers behind everything are rich and forgot about the meaning of hip hop culture. Everybody who organized just a small event should know how much work, energy and costs it takes to put it together and at the end it is only fair if you earn some money with it if you still stick to the roots.<sup>2</sup>

Up to this point, I have avoided the topic of authenticity. Much has been said about authenticity and popular music in the past (Frith 1983, Thornton 1995, Théberge 1997). The consensus is that authenticity is a value judgement, and that this judgement is made not only about performers, but also about audiences and technologies.

Thomas<sup>3</sup> describes how, in his dealing with b-boys, he has come to think that:

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.battleoftheyear.de/about.html>> [Accessed August 10, 2010]

<sup>3</sup> I interviewed Thomas at the national finals for *Battle of the Year* leading up to the international competition. This took place in August 2008. I had been living in Berlin for three months and practicing with the dancers there for two or three hour training

The scene is limiting itself also. You know. Most of the dancers they don't want to be on theatre stages because they think it's not real. Same with the graffiti writers some deny legal works. You can't deny. A lot of dancers are still very unorganised or unprofessional so they limit themselves because they come from social minorities ...

The question of personal limitations is a tricky one that needs to be addressed through the sort of analysis I have attempted here, which demonstrates the pressures, conflicts and various diffusions of a cultural form and movement. The healthy competition that has fuelled some of the developments in the dance style is maintained alongside a fundamentally problematic form of competition rooted in capitalism, oppressions and their subsequent limitations, alongside blatant and implicit racism. As Johnson (2009) noted in her trip to Germany for Battle of the Year, she was surprised at the underlying racism that she interpreted in the breaking cyphers she witnessed there.

What the website explanation makes clear is that event organisers are on the defensive in terms of their actions and dedication. Belonging to hip hop culture is judged and interpreted differently, based often on the ethnicity and context of the various participants. To be a participant in the game is to open oneself up to critique and this makes 'whiteness' visible<sup>4</sup> to participants. In my interviews with 'white' and Asian dancers, I was able to access some of their deep-rooted anxieties. Many felt that they could never consider themselves to be full participants because of their ethnic identity, and yet they loved the dance

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sessions minimum most days of the week at various community centers throughout the city. The training was intense as I was preparing to battle with Tatsumaki San, the local all b-girl crew, at an international competition taking place in Berlin.

<sup>4</sup> Theorist Richard Dyer ([1979] 1990, 1997) was the first adequately to address 'whiteness' in relation to dance practices, in his important works on ethnicity and disco dancing.

in such a way that this experience of feeling inadequate, or of never truly belonging, was constantly being navigated and situated within a struggle for ethnic equality of which they felt a part. However, as is evident from Johnson's account, this is not always the case.

Beyond the deep-rooted questions relating to ethnicity and identity associated with the internationalisation of the dance, which can not be adequately considered here and requires a project of its own<sup>5</sup>, the question then becomes: how can an international b-boy/b-girl event be considered 'authentic' or 'real' for the participants themselves through their experiences of it? This is actually a key concern for breaking, because an event is only as good as the dancers that show up to it.

There are several ways that event organisers deal with this. First of all, if they invite good dancers or crews, and pay for them to come, then they can ensure in their promotional materials that there will be guests there that other b-boys and b-girls will want to see. Second, event organisers need to make sure there is room to dance and to cypher, as b-boys and b-girls will not want to come to an event just to watch other b-boys on stage. Third, event organisers need to make sure there is good music (i.e. a good DJ). A good floor for dancing is also an often-neglected aspect to think about for event organisers that are not b-boys, whereas a b-boy who is also an event organiser will likely think of this first. Planning after-parties and pre-parties to make the event of a longer, more worthwhile duration, also helps in attracting out of town dancers. Keeping the cost down, both in terms of ticket cost and accommodation, is also a way to

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<sup>5</sup> Imani Kai Johnson's (2009) PhD thesis is the beginning of such a project.

ensure that b-boys and b-girls will be interested to come. From all of these examples, what is clear is that an 'authentic' event caters to b-boys and b-girls and is organised around giving paying ticket holders the room to dance themselves. Authenticity is a value judgement about *participation* in b-boy culture, alongside an underlying judgement about belonging and ethnicity that underwrites all exchanges. Those events where there is not room to dance in cyphers are seen as inauthentic, because they are designed for spectators to watch breaking, rather than for dancers to participate.

When BOTY started, Thomas pointed out that, although his crew (of b-boys, DJs and graffiti writers) was based out of Hannover, they did not know many of the b-boys even in Berlin. This was during the 1980s leading up to the beginning of the event, before the advent of the Internet, mobile phones, etc. When they attended events in Hamburg in 1988 and 1989 they got to know other dancers. The contacts that they accrued for the event took time to develop. In the first year, 1990, they had crews from Switzerland and England that were well known. For example, the known European crews of the time included Battle Squad, Aktuel Force, Second to None, Enemy Squad and Crazy Force crew. In the initial years of the event, crews were selected based on their reputations, through word of mouth, and their contacts and networks with those in Germany. Crews could also submit videos to be selected.

Thomas described how the judges for the first eight or nine years were not that good. There were many reasons for this. Storm offered one when he explained that at the beginning of his career it was easier to judge because he knew less. Now, he has to study b-boys and b-girls from all around the world

and stay current with all the event footage to know what is new, original and fresh. There is more information now which all needs to be organised, filtered and considered. For BOTY, judges were originally selected that were a little bit older. In the beginning, they were not always paid, and did the judging for status, as a favour or as a sign of recognition. As time has gone on, event organisers now look for judges that are reliable; well known dancers who are also able to judge well. When I asked about the judging system that is now in place at this international event, Thomas replied:

We have a judging system which more or less describes what it takes to be a complete and good b-boy more or less describes including the aspect of the choreography so we are basically looking for judges that understand the dance as a whole, like really all aspects, and the general aspects of dancing to the rhythm, stage expression, stuff like this and of course the judges need to understand the different categories, like they have to know what a good power move is about what is an easy power move, same for toprocking, downrocking, footwork, freezes, so those are the categories. So the judges need to know everything all aspects of the b-boy scene.

The criteria that Thomas focuses on at points concern the level of difficulty required for various moves. This is an interesting concern as one of the major distinctions that can be drawn between non-dancers and dancers is an understanding of the physical complexities of moves. Sometimes for audiences a move can look difficult (as 'power moves' often do – power moves are a category of moves defined as such because of the amount of 'power' they seem to require) but for a dancer they may be relatively easy compared to a move that may look rather easy to an audience, such as certain footwork. As Ken Swift has often pointed out, footwork can require more effort and strength than some

of the so-called ‘power moves’ that require more momentum or flexibility than actual ‘power.’

Storm, who is the most well known European dancer, and was invited by *Battle of the Year* to help them develop a judging system, talked about comparisons in our interview. Crews need to respond in a way that makes it easy to compare them with others. They need to do what the other crew did, and then add more. Rounds build up on each other. In a controversial turn, he suggested that, “if this is your art, then don’t compete.” This statement can be seen to encourage competitors to make explicit for the judges a comparison with others, rather than make claims to an art status in response to judgements with which they disagree.

The *Battle of the Year* web page contains a new feature, which describes the way that the event will be judged<sup>6</sup> :

**Battle Criteria to Vote**

- » **Response** How does the crew/dancer react on what the opposite has given.
- » **Routines** What kind of “Battle”- routines does the crew/dancer bring on stage.
- » **Strategy** How the crew/dancer is planning and perform during the battle.
- » **Attitude** What kind of mentality brings the crew/ dancer to the battle situation. Is there any disrespecting acting which has not to do with the battle itself. It’s not about who is going nearer to the battle opponent or who is insulting more, but it’s about who is better in B-Boying/ Girling.
- » **Voluntary Touching** No touching permitted!

<sup>6</sup> See <<http://www.battleoftheyear.de/about/judging-system.html>> [Accessed August 16, 2010]

### What Are The Judges Looking At To Decide How To Vote The Different Criteria

Point of view concerning "knowledge":

- » **Vocabulary** "A supply of expressive means; a repertoire of communication" How many different movements is the crew/dancer able to do.
- » **Innovation** "The act of introducing something new" What makes the crew something special, different to the others.
- » **Foundation** "The act of founding, especially the establishment of an institution with provisions for future maintenance. The basis on which a thing stands, is founded, or is supported" How many of the basic movements, that have been evolved in the beginning of this dance, is the crew/dancer able to do.
- » **Concept** "A general idea derived or inferred from specific instances or occurrences. Something formed in the mind; a thought or notion" Do the things which the crew/dancer is doing work together, does it makes sense. Is there a clear idea or a message in what the crew/ dancer is showing.

Point of view concerning "execution":

- » **Control** "Authority or ability to manage or direct" How clean and perfect is the crew/dancer able to do the movements. It's not about hitting the floor and destroying the body.
- » **Expression** "The act of expressing, conveying, or representing in words, art, music, or movement; a manifestation" How does the crew/dancer show his/its feelings. Does the crew/dancer communicate with the crowd thru the movements and the interpretation of the music.
- » **Aesthetics** "A guiding principle in matters of artistic beauty and taste; artistic sensibility" How good looks what the crew/dancer is doing. Does it fit to the b-boy formula.
- » **Rhythm** "Movement or variation characterized by the regular recurrence or alternation of different quantities or conditions" Does the crew/ dancer move to the rhythm.
- » **Difficulty** "The condition or quality of being difficult" How difficult is what the crew/ dancer is doing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This is from "Why a judging system" on the Battle of the Year website.  
<<http://www.battleoftheyear.de/about/judging-system.html>> [Accessed August 16, 2010]

The final “point of view” regarding “execution” is interesting here because aesthetic qualifications in a rather conventional sense are listed. Here issues of beauty, taste and sensibility arise, using a very 18<sup>th</sup> century understanding of aesthetics. In ending this description by asking, “does it fit to the b-boy formula,” what is most interesting is how the notion of aesthetics is applied so casually to breaking practices, the view that breaking is an art form which adheres to aesthetic principles and that this can be applied to either the individual dancer or the crew in a competitive setting where their moves will be judged against another crew. This comparative notion of aesthetics also existed in the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Scholars such as Hutcheson argued that pleasure was often found in a secondary category of “relative or comparative beauty” spawned from “apprehending ‘the conformity or unity between a copy and an original’” (Hutcheson quoted in Wetmore 2009). In breaking practice, the pleasure in comparing one dancer with another, or one crew with another, is central to the dance practice and an aesthetic judgement here is rooted in an understanding of pleasure as central to aesthetic experience<sup>8</sup>.

When Battle of the Year organised this framework for the competition, they took out the judging strategy of the past where individual b-boys and b-girls judged the competition based on their own criteria or intuitions. In this

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<sup>8</sup> See Malbon (1999) for a neat overview of the significance of Nietzsche’s views about aesthetic for contemporary approaches to understanding popular dance forms. My own contribution is to focus on comparative contexts for aesthetic appreciation such as the ‘battle’ in breaking, where relative or comparative judgements are not secondary to some other, idealised form of art presentation in the accounts of participants.



new judging system, with which the competitors are familiar, the judges must now be accountable to the criteria listed. Former, well-respected judges of Battle of the Year helped to create these criteria. As will be seen later when considering the case of Dyzee's judging system, having well respected pioneers of the dance 'vouch' for the system is a necessary part of establishing its credibility. The one rule that cannot be broken in this system was already in place before the written formalities and criteria, and is that you cannot touch your opponents or you will be eliminated (or lose the battle).

Judges at international breaking competitions are primarily concerned with developing systems of judgement that are accountable and fair<sup>9</sup>. This includes, for them, the difficulties of evaluating musicality, as dancers perform in an improvised way to break beats, selected by the DJs. I will explore here the attempts by internationally reputable figures in breaking scenes to develop systems of judgement that work.

Although all criteria of judgement involve both explicit and tacit knowledge, musicality in pre-choreographed routines is the area that I will focus on especially, to consider where issues of musical taste mix with conceptual frameworks about tacit knowledge. Berman, Down and Hill (2002) suggested that tacit knowledge has two types: individual tacit knowledge and group- or team-based tacit knowledge, and that groups working together accumulate a special type of knowledge of each other, that initially aids in their

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<sup>9</sup> "In what we call the arts there developed what we call a 'judge' — i.e. one who has judgement. This does not mean just someone who admires or does not admire. We have an entirely new element." (6) in Rush Rhees' notes on a lecture by Wittgenstein (2007), in *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*.

development and competitive edge, yet which at some point can lead to predictably in performance.

In the judging system, as laid out for BOTY, as with other systems, participants have argued that judging musicality in routines is difficult because the movements have been pre-planned to be synchronous amongst crew members. However, musicality is evident in the tacit knowledge of a crew, as a group. This appears in the moments when dancers intuitively know when their routine partner will start, rather than having to count off or pause, and in the ways in which they coordinate their bodies in space and in time with the music, as a team, when unpredictable accents in the music occur or when the space is narrowed by enclosing competitors or awkwardly landed moves.

One of the shifts that have occurred with international competitions is a focus on breaking crews as representative of their nation state. For example, dancers from South Korea and Russia now compete in the finals in a breaking championship in the UK. American b-boys feel a pressure to dance well because they are representing the States (where breaking originated) yet they are from California not from New York. National identities and categories, rather than an emphasis on crew names, are increasingly being used as organisational structures for international competitions. The Battle of the Year event is now in the state of becoming a franchise of sorts. Each country holds elimination rounds and sends the best crews to compete in Germany. (Since the time of this initial research, the event has been moved to its new international home in France with new event organisers).

Thomas also explained that good DJs for these events are very hard to come by, because most DJs do not know what the dancers want to hear; what the appropriate music is for the different dances. In his last years of running the event, Thomas would try out a DJ at a regional or national event to see how they would do there, before inviting them to the international finals. He mentioned that he is not only looking for a good DJ but also someone that their 'family' (event organisers) gets along with and can be friends with.

Emcees are another important part of breaking events. BOTY emcees, such as Trix, play an integral role in establishing the relationship between audience and performers. The emcee's role is to *mediate* between pleasing and hyping the spectators and to keep the event running smoothly. Often, they can explain or 'translate' what is happening in terms of judgements, reputations and the quirks of individual performers, for spectators who are unfamiliar with the codes and conventions of the dance.

#### Dyzee's Judging System

Karl "Dyzee" Alba, who was introduced in the chapter about crews, has been developing a judging system and promoting it worldwide since 2007<sup>10</sup>. His objective was to develop a system of judgement that is fair for international competitors. Being one himself, he felt that there was a need and a demand for

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<sup>10</sup> cf. a PowerPoint presentation video with audio commentary by Dyzee about the international judging system as it stands recently here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqllk-49e8U&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqllk-49e8U&feature=player_embedded) [Accessed June 18, 2011]

an accountable system, to let competitors know how judges are making their decisions. He states:

Hopefully from there it'll start becoming more professional. People will pick it up maybe its gonna change things. I'm hoping that people will say that they want to use a fair system rather than people just judge and choose who they want ...They are like I hate how judges are judging so they think the scene is drying up ... People are judging based on their opinions and that's not fair because anything can affect someone's opinion. Maybe it is fair to some people. But if I lose, I want to know why I lost with facts. I want my facts to make sense. Was that guy a better dancer than me? Did he have more dynamics?

In his system, there would be five judges. Each judge decides the winner of a battle based on one specific category. To win, a b-boy must win 3/5 categories as decided by the judges. Part of this system also involves computer programming, so that the audience and competitors can see the points as they accrue during a battle on a large screen. The categories in brief are:

1. Who is the better dancer? Using finesse, footwork and rocking beats (Foundations).
2. Who is more fresh? A better artist? (Originality)
3. Who has got crazier tricks? Difficult moves? (Dynamics)
4. Who can execute everything? Who cannot make any mistakes? (Execution)
5. Who has a better strategy? Who can respond to their opponent? (Strategy)

The next part of Dyzee's judging system has been to 'sell' the ideas behind it to event organisers, and reputable b-boys in the scene. His goal in 2010, for example, was to get approval from key b-boys in New York City. He explained his ideas for the system and the reasons behind it on a trip there and hopes to build a formal structure for 'authenticating' judges to be qualified to judge in each of the different categories.

Individual judges have also developed their own unique systems of judging competitions. One judge explained to me that he goes round for round on a scale from 1 to 10, deciding which b-boy/b-girl “took it”. If the score is even at the end he decides which dancer lost in a ‘worse’ way. He looks at qualities such as foundations, creativity, fluidity, speed and footwork. This involves not only execution, but also funkiness and style. Another b-boy suggested that it is good to decide before hand what you are judging on and then remain internally consistent during the battle. Lazy Legz from Montreal related that when he is judging he looks at a dancer’s presence. He also looks for strategies, technique and overall performance.

There was a time when judges would discuss amongst themselves who they thought had won after a battle, and would then tell the emcee and the crowd their decision. This approach tends not to be used anymore for several reasons. For example, judges can be persuasive and can influence each other’s decisions. The general procedure used now in battles involves the emcee counting to three and each of the judges pointing at who they thought won. By doing this at the same time, each judge’s individual decision is counted. Ideally there is an odd number of judges, and most competitions tend to have three.

Judges are often asked to give competitors feedback, after the battle, on why they lost. One judge explained that there are two types of attitude shown by people when they approach him. Some want to know how they can improve, and the others think they should not have lost. Often times, he explained, it is friends and fans of competitors that approach him to demand to know why their friends or favourite dancers lost. B-boy Storm said that when South

Korean individuals would ask for feedback, he would provide them with some comments on what they could improve, and six months later ALL of the b-boys there would have the missing ingredient. In this instance, the South Korean b-boy crews were doing very difficult and advanced power moves, but not on beat to the music. When it was suggested to them that they need to do their moves on beat, they took this comment back to their training sessions and the next time they were centre stage at an international competition their ability to do aerial moves on beat to the music at high degrees of difficulty had advanced beyond what anyone had imagined humanly possible<sup>11</sup>. Storm jokingly mused, “What should I ask them to do next?” In this way, judges become architects for the scene, suggesting better performances of an ever increasing standard of difficulty that are imagined into being through diligent practitioners.

Many of the recent debates about judging have focused on *commandos* or routines. For example, how do you judge musicality when two people are doing a routine that they planned in advance? Also, crews can sometimes have ‘stolen rounds’ where the addition of a routine gives them more ammunition to win a round against another crew that has only sent in one b-boy. It is interesting to note the follow-up analogy to ‘stolen rounds’. When the audience of b-boys and b-girls think a crew or competitors should have won, but the judges decided that their opponent won, they say that the dancers “got robbed”. Generally, this means that the b-boy/b-girl audience thought that the decision of the judges was political, or just plain wrong. The tracing of original

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<sup>11</sup> See examples of Korean b-boys doing power moves to the music here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq5FCK\\_mWP4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq5FCK_mWP4) [Accessed June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011]

slang back to African American origins would be telling, and although that is outside the confines of my particular study, clearly links this cultural form to an African American cultural heritage and subversive language.

At an international event in 2008 in France, b-boys and DJs stayed up all night, the night before the competition, to discuss the pros and cons of Dyzee's judging system. When trying to break down the components to include in judgement, it becomes clear quite quickly that those developing the act of judgement are the architects of breaking culture. This changes over time. For example, when judges first wanted to be seen as accountable and fair, the quality of 'execution' was over-emphasised. It was easy to say to competitors, you made a mistake and that is why you lost. However, this strategy is now being questioned.

#### The International Event<sup>12</sup>

Hip OpSession 5 is an annual international breaking competition in February each year in Nantes, France. Spectators play a huge role in this, specific international event. They are considered in every aspect of the way the event is organised, including the seating at the event and the parties before and after the event. Although b-boys and b-girls see themselves as 'families', as has been discussed, many of the dancers are not interested in events where real families are welcome. Although this is seen to change the dynamics of the event, in some ways this is more representative of how breaking would have

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix C, "Ethnographic field notes: Hip OpSession, Nantes, France 2009" for a detailed ethnographic account of the day.

been performed at block parties and outdoor events in New York City in the early days. Part of the culture initially was doing spectacular moves to impress people that do not break.

When I practiced with local b-boys (a few of them originally from Russia) a few weeks after the event in Nantes, France in 2009, they commented that the organisers were not really part of the local breaking scene. Although one year they, the local b-boys, had been asked for suggestions about which crews to invite over, they did not feel that they have been able to contribute to the shaping of the event as much as they would like. This distance between international event structures and local scenes tends to be perceived as a disjuncture for local participants, another case for the observation that there is an attribute of generosity at the international festival that does not coincide with local generosity and exchanges throughout the rest of the year.

This event takes place at a cultural centre and is sponsored by business and local government. For the local community, beyond hip hop culture, this is a special time of year to celebrate hip hop, and then things go back to normal for the rest of the year. An American musician/b-boy at the event appreciated how much support the spectators were giving the dance. It is this support from spectators that he feels is lacking where he is from. However, this community support is only an annual *moment* of appreciation. The festival representation is always slightly misleading in this way, regardless of the art form discussed.

The younger b-boys and b-girls at this event tend to ignore those spectators that do not have the codes and conventions of the scene. Those that are clearly families, those not dressed as b-boys or b-girls and the support staff



that make the event happen, are ignored. This is one way the local and regional b-boys and b-girls deal with the issues of sharing space with outsiders, and with not having an event centered on the b-boy/b-girl experience.

Assessments by younger b-boys about who is and who is not part of the scene, especially at international festivals, often suffer from a lack of cultural memory. For example, Dyzee recently explained that a local, younger b-boy in Toronto told him at a practice how to do his own move 'right'. The local b-boy did not realise that Dyzee was the creator of the move. Similarly, a b-boy mentioned, on the comments under a YouTube clip of Dyzee discussing his judging system, that he had not realised that Dyzee was a b-boy. Instead, he just thought Dyzee was an enthusiast of the dance, trying to introduce a judging system. This new system was introduced for the first time in South Korea at an international event, R16<sup>13</sup>. For b-boys, history is fleeting and older b-boys (often those with families of their own now at b-boy events) are not recognised for what they are: often former participants of a scene from the past.

The introduction of younger b-boys and b-girls into the scene is always exciting for retired and older, active participants. Certain crews can begin to dominate the international scene and this becomes worrying for event organisers who want to see new generations coming in with fresh ideas. The introduction of a live band into the event, which is normally centered on recorded music, is a recent, fresh idea that adds a different character.

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<sup>13</sup> Dyzee's interview about the new judging system at R16 is here:  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydJ-zgHryI>> [Accessed December 30, 2010]

Another special thing about the event in Nantes is that it is accessible to outsiders. Although this changes the experience for the b-boys, it contributes to the possibilities of new, younger b-boys and b-girls being exposed to the dance form, which is positive for the culture. Also, the introduction of a guide, giving sign language live on the video screen, makes the event accessible for those with hearing disabilities. Again, thoughtful gestures, that the b-boys and b-girls rarely mention or appreciate, but the spectators definitely do.

Fashion is also a key component of b-boy/b-girl culture as I have mentioned. Fashion is a way to distinguish oneself from outsiders to the dance, to become recognisable to other b-boys, and to distinguish your crew from other crews. This also shows unity and a certain level of commitment.

When the emcees introduce b-boys and b-girls in the preliminaries, the centrality of their role becomes apparent. Some of those that show up are known b-boys and b-girls and some are younger crews. The emcees make obvious to the crowd (and the judges) whom they should know. This also is likely to affect the confidence of the dancers. The emcees also teach new b-boys about the moral conduct of battles. They tell them how to address their opponents before and after battles. No hugging before, but definitely making peace afterwards.

Cyphers take on a special meaning in comparison with formal, international competitions. Only top competitors make it to the finals of international competitions but all b-boys and b-girls can participate in cyphers. When b-boys and b-girls lose in competition they often head to the cypher to reorganise their egos and remind themselves that they are indeed good

dancers, even if they lost or messed up a move in competition. Many dancers who have difficulty with the additional pressures of competitions excel in cyphers. In competition, each b-boy/b-girl has to perform musical tastes, whether he/she is feeling the music or not. Those who rely on the emotional expression of and their relationship to the music will not always excel in this formal arrangement, and often dance better when they can choose what song to dance to. Cyphers provide more control over that option as well.

### Criteria for Judgement

How do crews win at international battles? Criteria have changed over time. One rule that is worth noting is that crews that enter must dance together like a real crew, not be a makeshift team. So there is a distinction made between crews and teams. Crews win by working as a team rather than as individuals. This comes through in training. To win a crew battle, people need to help each other progress and have knowledge and understanding of each other's motives, strategies and reactions. Crews that train together often, and share space locally, learn intimately the thinking and movements of their friends, and this informs how they can predict responses in a battle situation.

Crews can also have internal competitiveness, between individuals within their own crews. However, to win competitions people need to work on their *collective* strengths and strategies. The b-boys in Hustle Kidz explained that they were originally part of different crews, but came together because of their similar mind set, that is their high level of commitment to training; or as one could put it, their *professionalisation*.

The whole introduction of judging systems has to do with the professionalisation of the dance. This professionalisation has implications for performing musical tastes, hence when I interviewed b-boys about competition and judgement, individual musical tastes or mentions of music rarely came up as a topic. When I would ask b-boys and b-girls explicitly about the music at international breaking events, they would say that you have to just dance to whatever music is played and perform as if you are really 'feeling' the music. People will often complain about the music, but it is rarely considered as an obstacle to fairness in judgement, even though it clearly affects how dance is read by judges. B-boys and b-girls are not judged on how much they appreciate the music, and the music that they hear at international competitions may not be to their taste, and this does not matter in this context. They must perform musical tastes, and express the music, whether this is to their taste or not.

#### Events as Institutions

Through the creation of new institutions such as the international competition circuit, including many of the events mentioned above, judging criteria are becoming more and more formalised, and event organisers and judges are under pressure to provide fair judgements, as well as accountability for the choices that they make. The score sheets for *Battle of the Year*, for example, are now available online after the event.

New audiences also play a part in the institutionalisation of the dance. In Nantes, France, at *Hip Opession*, the participation of the audience, as paying spectators, makes the event possible. Alongside this contribution, many others

contribute to the successful organisation of the event. Judges are tested and questioned about the judgements that they make. For example, when b-boy Born was called out by the competitors, he had to prove his skills to the crowd to demonstrate his ability to judge the Vagabond crew<sup>14</sup>. Audiences can often disagree with the judges, and whether this is the b-boy spectators, or families at *Hip Opseession*, these responses are part of what keeps the event engaging, and the conversations flowing throughout the day, as the judgements about the dance are shaped by these debates.

I would like to end this chapter by pointing out the centrality of a concern for judgement of dancers, *by* dancers, that was beginning to develop in the 1990s and early 2000s. An example from Toronto's history is telling here. During my time in Toronto, Dyzee was also actively involved in formal and informal teaching, taking dance classes himself (Lindy Hop in one instance) and researching for future master class workshops that would take place in Montreal, and in cities in the UK later on. However, one of his main concerns was creating a judging system, as mentioned earlier. When I asked Dyzee about his previous involvement as an event organiser, he explained that he wanted to organise an 'underground' event created for dancers, by dancers, and most importantly, judged by other dancers.<sup>15</sup>

This emphasis is a move away from audiences judging dancers on their spectacular qualities, towards b-boys judging each other on the perhaps more subtle nuances, originality, and innovation that are only recognisable to those

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix C for a description of this particular incident.

<sup>15</sup> August 8, 2007 interview that took place in car ride between Toronto and Montreal, Canada with other crew members present.

well-versed in the developments of the dance. This is also perhaps a historical observation to situate, as this was a time when b-boys still felt, locally, that they could recognise who had originated moves and developed them, before the Internet revolution.

The local b-boys who had judged events using Dyzee's new system, developed only recently, were sceptical of its organisation. One b-boy explained to me in an interview that when he judges a b-boy battle, he knows who has won the round. However, when he looks at his scorecard and he is meant to judge the battle on only one possible quality, sometimes he would have to give points to the b-boy that clearly lost the battle. He felt that did not make sense. There are a few issues at stake here. First, an attempt to remove the subjective tastes of the individual b-boy may also remove the tacit knowledge of the experienced b-boy judging a battle. Second, any judging system that is introduced will be treated sceptically by veteran b-boys who have judged events in the past, as each has clearly developed their own system and framework for making decisions. And finally, any judge working within an international system of judgement will have to make decisions that are *counter-intuitive* to his or her normal judgement in the immediacy of the moment and the battle. But then, all experiences of the international competition, as opposed to the local scene, are, as I would argue now, *counter-intuitive experiences*. The structures of belonging are reformulated; the judgement is no longer situated in localised experiences, habits and styles; the musical selections are carefully composed to safely fend off accusations of inauthenticity, and the commercialised components of the

dance (the sponsorships) are the antithesis of the cultural practice that is at the root of a dance practice built on embodied work and sustaining social networks.

### Judgement

As a cultural sociologist interested in performance, I have focused in this chapter on one major area in the world of performance arts: competitions. For b-boys and b-girls, competitions are the main arena where reputations are established through consistency in winning judged battles. Competitions are organised around agreed upon principles and conventions. I am interested in judgement that is aimed at 'fairness', in an arena where there is little in the way of formal or written criticism, although, as I have demonstrated, written rules of judgement are becoming debated and made explicit as competitions continue to develop.

Finally, I want to consider a few aspects of the way competitions have been examined theoretically in the hopes of shaping some future directions for this descriptive account. First, performances onstage are often evaluated with a different set of expectations and conventions than are performances of social roles in everyday life. There *are* similarities, and these have been successfully drawn out in sociological frameworks (informed by performance studies). However one major difference is the clear definition of the roles of performer and audience. Here, unlike a patron dancing in a club, the competitor is expected to perform *for* the audience. Often, there is a clear, physical demarcation in the space between performer and audience.

Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1993) is cynical of competitions in the

performing arts: they produce 'docile students' he argued. He suggested that these competitions breed collective training that homogenises and that they also create hierarchies based on seniority rather than competence, with curricula that are strictly defined in stages, with initiative rites. What then is the logic of competitions? He writes:

... the incredible docility that it assumes and reinforces in students who are maintained in an infantile dependency by the logic of competition and the frantic expectations it creates (the opening of the Salon gives rise to scenes of pathos), and the normalization brought by collective training in the ateliers, with their initiation rites, their hierarchies linked as much to seniority as to competence, and their curricula with strictly defined stages and programmes. (241)

B-boys and b-girls think about the logic of competitions differently. For example, many b-boys and b-girls suggested to me that the reason that the scene has continued to evolve and progress is because of the centrality of battles for the culture. They have argued that battles push people to improve continually and raise the bar. Also, while discussing the judging systems, I mentioned that b-boys and b-girls, when starting to become more self-conscious about the importance of judging fairly, began to raise the expectations for execution. If you made a mistake you were eliminated, and this fits in many ways with Bourdieu's observations. However, over time and with continuing debates about the judgement of battles, b-boys and b-girls are lessening the focus on mistakes, and the criteria shift again to accept competitors that take more risks and are original.

In other words, although breaking culture and practice consist of a group of activities governed by individuals of influence ('the architects'), the shifts in



the culture also come from the collective intelligence of the group. In crew battles, tacit knowledge involves the knowledge formed between crew members over time and how this gets performed in the strategic and synchronous energy produced in competitive structures.

Although he is not specifically referring to competitions, Howard Becker (1982) argued that aesthetic judgements are:

... reliable, and that reliability reflects not the mouthing of already agreed-on judgements, but the systematic application of similar standards by trained and experienced members of the art world.  
(155)

This is similar to the case in breaking but, as Storm argued, the more you know the *harder* it is to judge. This is why dancers have been trying to develop criteria, or aspects to notice, that will assist them in making important decisions.

## Chapter 11: Online Representation and Reputation

“Haters make me famous.”  
Anonymous

Breaking is a mediated art form, and mediation has been central to the dynamics of taste and judgement in breaking culture. This chapter addresses how breaking is represented and discussed online. By describing the website of the UK B-Boy Championships, a current international breaking event, I will argue that the reputation (and *renown*) of such events depends on balancing the expectations of sponsors, dancers and audiences. For example, promotional material on websites navigates these expectations explicitly, as well as providing an opportunity for the individual self-promotion of participants. In the previous chapter, I addressed how international events and judgements are often experienced as *counter-intuitive*. What is in many ways an embodied practice, built on work principles that function directly against an economic model, is reorganised to produce profits for corporations and sponsors. This problematic relationship is sustained by a *lack* of support for breaking competitions from the ‘art’ world. The critical backlash, amongst b-boys/b-girls, against the more commercial elements of hip hop culture is rarely discussed on this axis of profit, exclusion and the counter-intuitive experiences of dancers in their various roles as judges, promoters, event organizers, agents and spectators.

In the ethnographic and textual analysis that follows, I take up two

approaches outlined in Christine Hine's (2000) book *Virtual Ethnography*. In the first instance, I describe how b-boys perceive the significance of the Internet as a promotional tool in the development of their careers. In the second instance, I treat the event website as a 'cultural artifact'. As such, the Internet can be seen as, "a product of culture: a technology that was produced by particular people with contextually situated goals and priorities" (Hine 2000, 9). In this way, I address the significance of what is put on websites by event organisers to promote their event, whether or not the participants even read, or give any significance to the representation that is found there.

#### Considerations from the Material Realm: From Video to Internet

Dyzeer recalls that it was the early 2000s when the transition came from reputations based on videos or events, and the new medium of the Internet appeared as a site for exposure. The role of battles becomes more significant in this new medium, and beating b-boys and b-girls who have already established international reputations is key to building one's name. Dyzeer describes it thus:

It [b-boy/b-girl culture] was transitioning from video to Internet. I was on the intro for the [B-boy Summit event] tape. It wasn't just that but all the good b-boys saw me there. They offered me to battle Jay Rawk from Style Elements. That's when Sept. 11 happened. I couldn't go, I was upset. I won Rocksteady 2002 [an Anniversary event for the Rocksteady crew that takes place in New York City]. Nobody knew who I was. All the good b-boys were there. It was the last year it had that notoriety. The next year nobody went. After I won that, the guy invited me to battle Jay Rawk. I got flown to California shortly after. I killed Jay Rawk [beat him in the battle]... I was the only one doing really low freezes, I was the only one doing things like stepping on my foot and using my flexibility, using threads and changing my footwork. He was like a big shot at the time. It was funny because I was the happy me. He was [demonstrates being out of breath]

and I'm like you only got three more rounds man come on. Shortly after that, people were like whoa. There were all these events in Rochester New York and I beat Vietnam and Frankie Flav and those videos were all up on Internet. A lot of clips of me and then I blew up after that. Then Freestyle Session came and I did really good in that. People liked my sets. Did Lords of the Floor [another American event] with my ex-girlfriend. We got far. From there I started getting flown places to battle and judge.

The earliest exchanges of digital files online happened before the rise of YouTube, Vimeo and other avenues for sharing moving pictures. Videos of events were pirated by fellow b-boys. mIRC<sup>1</sup> was one of the earliest ways to find videos, when videos were ripped from VHS to online digital formats. Dancers connected with other users and had to get to know them a bit online before they would let them download their videos from the servers. Compared to these early days, when connections between users were essential, digital files now have a more instantaneous exchange rate and viewing them does not involve downloading data to the same extent.

#### Instant Feedback

With the rise of the Internet, knowledge, gossip and judgements have been able to flow across vast geographical regions, instantaneously. The effects of this new technological development are currently being discussed by b-boys and b-girls in every day conversation and online. An analysis of *reputation* is integral to this discussion, and this analysis will borrow from key sociological insights about the cultivation of reputation in the arts, outlined very briefly below. Reputation, and the counterintuitive promotion of self and crew through

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<sup>1</sup> The most popular of the first internet relay chat (IRC) programs for the PC.

commercialised avenues, whilst simultaneously trying to legitimise a non-commercial form of art, is a new area of consideration that will be examined through a discussion of the discourses available on international event websites.

Sociologists have considered how *individual* reputations are built in art worlds through the involvement of participants in the codes and conventions of a particular genre (Becker 1982), the endorsement and support of influential figures (Mulkay and Chaplin 1982), self-promotion (Kapsis 1989) and the posthumous remembrances of artists in cultural or 'collective' memory (Lang and Lang 1988). *Event organisers* build the reputation of their *event* and, in doing so, they create the promotional materials necessary for the renown of individual dancers, judges, DJs, and emcees. However, the decisions that they make about how to promote these individuals express a commercialised culture, rather than an art form understood in the conventional art discourses supported by art promoters, gatekeepers and institutions. In other words, this cultural practice occupies an ambiguous position. Websites are used as both promotional and critical tools for annual events and reveal the complexities of how reputations are established in breaking culture.

American sociologists, Lang and Lang (1988) distinguish between two aspects of reputation, and this distinction will serve well in an analysis of websites as promotional agents for international events. The two categories they define are:

**Recognition:** "Recognition refers to the esteem in which others in the same 'art world' (Becker 1982, 254) hold the artist. It depends largely on evaluations of artistic output by teachers, professional peers, and other significant 'insiders.' It can be gauged by such measures as election to artistic societies,

acceptance of work in juried exhibitions and awards won. But achievements alone do not make an artist famous. There have always been artists' artists who enjoy the esteem of peers but otherwise remain 'undiscovered.'" (84)

**Renown:** "Renown signifies a more cosmopolitan form of recognition beyond the esoteric circles in which the artist moves. It is measurable by how well a person is known outside a specific art world and depends on the publicity that only critics and dealer promotion provide. The appropriate indicators of renown consist of press notices, sales, museum purchases, and other attention to the work and persona of the artist." (84-85)

Recognition is discussed at length on b-boy forums online. Renown is revealed on international event websites.

Reputations in hip hop are always contested and debated<sup>2</sup>. This is most significant when considering how recognition operates amongst peers. As the quotation that begins this chapter, "haters make me famous", concedes, the idea of *not* being supported by peers or outsiders is prevalent in this culture, and psychological security is built up to protect egos from the harshness of these realities. Becker (1974) argues, similarly, that members of art worlds, and various contending groups, tend to undermine each other or compete for dominance. In doing so, aesthetic beliefs are used to convince others of the legitimacy of a particular school, artist or group.

The significance of the Internet for the recognition of older dancers, within breaking forums and communities, is changing the known history of breaking. This offers up important comparisons with how the dance is discussed on event pages. Older generations of dancers, who stopped practising, are reappearing online to share alternative histories about the origins and

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 and (Fogarty 2006) where I argue this point.

developments of various hip hop and funk styles. These histories are being shared with a new audience of younger dancers, who often use the web as a primary source for learning more about the dance. This is especially true for those that start dancing in new places without a well-established scene. As Gay Morris (2001) has argued, in relation to contemporary dance practices, as performers<sup>3</sup> age they experience a loss of capital. Reputations need to be continually refreshed. With the rise of the Internet, and its usage by b-boys and b-girls, older dancers who have long since disappeared are re-emerging to make their claims for recognition in the dance.

The generational distinctions between how different generations of b-boys and b-girls use the Internet overlap to reconstruct collective histories. B-boy forums, blogs and websites have allowed newer dancers to become introduced to aspects of the culture. Also, websites are a place where older b-boys and b-girls can share knowledge and 'school' younger ones, often with familial, frustrated tones or disapproving corrections. In both cases, the Internet has enabled participants who have not had an opportunity to tour or travel, a forum to have their voice heard. This is significant because many of the first b-boys and b-girls in New York City, and elsewhere, came from poor backgrounds and this affected the likelihood of their having opportunities to develop professional careers. This online transformation has changed the relationship of the local and international events in dynamic ways.

On websites and blogs, the reputations of participants in breaking worlds are often discussed, promoted and organised. In fact, two of the main b-boy

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<sup>3</sup> And choreographers known mainly for their performances.

websites are run by b-boy enthusiasts who used to work together but eventually parted company. Events tend to be connected with one website or the other in a competitive conflict that stems from both personal and financial divisions that exist in a rather tumultuous drama. This means that events are promoted on either one website or the other, and b-boys and b-girls at the international level tend to be affiliated with either one website or the other. This competition exists in a gray area where fights get intense, involved and problematic. These organisational conflicts are reflected and mirrored in the discussions that take place on the forums.

For example, in discussion forums, there are consensus-building activities about aesthetic judgements and the reliability of particular judges, 'pioneers' and other participants. Sources are checked and double-checked, authority is questioned, and emotions are stirred. Since most of the forums are intended for a b-boy audience, the assumption that participants are 'insiders' to the culture is common.

Breaking forums, event pages and individual blogs are not only places where information and gossip is shared, but can also be places where censorship happens. For example, a b-boy with an international reputation recently told me that someone who has politics with his crew runs one of the major forums for breaking. The result of this has been that any posts that mention him are deleted from the site. In other words, he is erased, on that particular forum, unless someone has something negative to say about him or



his crew.<sup>4</sup> As he continues to win more international events than anyone, his *renown* increases. How his *recognition* within breaking worlds is affected by online *deletion* remains to be seen. I would argue that the Internet is more powerful in terms of building renown than recognition, as b-boys and b-girls follow battles, in person and through online video clips, participating in the key debates through their everyday practices and conversations with other 'insiders.'

On websites for events, a different sort of website venture than forums, descriptions of participants provide key insights into the popular ideas and debates happening within the culture at the current moment. However, they do so through different channels. Event websites often include the views, and self-representation of competitors, as well as of DJs, event organisers, and judges. The possibilities for self-representation on an event website, alongside promotional materials about the participants in the event, suggest how reputations are shaped not only by institutions but also by individuals working within the system to self-promote. Here, reputation is not only a product of social institutions, global networks, competitions, travel, and individual abilities, but also of technological changes, methods of self-promotion and consensus building. These three latter aspects will be the primary focus of later examples in this chapter.

Values of a community are often expressed in online promotional literature. Interestingly, sociologist Howard Becker (1982) argues that as

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<sup>4</sup> I do not address blogs and forums directly in this chapter; however, this is one area for future studies about hip hop culture.

particular artists raise their profile, the genre within which they work is often also elevated. It will become clear throughout this chapter, that in breaking it is also the *event profile* that is raised.

In what follows I use descriptive analysis of the idioms and visual cues on websites to explore some of the values that dancers and event organisers put forward to the public. Also, I acknowledge that forums rely on participants speaking, reading and writing the same languages. The first section addresses b-boy forums, personal pages on social networking sites and event pages. The next section describes a particular event website in detail. I then analyse briefly the role of products and sponsors, and how events navigate distinct markets for insiders and outsiders.

#### B-boy<sup>5</sup> Forums and Personal Pages

The way that breaking is discussed on websites has changed with developments in the presentation and conventions of web pages over the years. One b-boy from Scotland explained that the first website he ever saw for breaking, around 1997, was all text based, and explained in words how to attempt moves. He and his friends would try to figure out new moves by reading the text from the site and then imagining how to do the moves. They found this very difficult as a learning process. The only video they had access to for a few years, that he remembers, was a Battle of the Year event video from 1997.

The way that breaking is talked about online, and how the breaking

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<sup>5</sup> There are a few specifically b-girl forums but most are referred to as solely 'b-boy' forums. This chapter reflects this current and ongoing gendered exclusion by dancers in their online addresses to just b-boys.

community interprets that talk, has changed over time as well. For example, in the late 1990s, people spoke of 'video' and 'internet' dancers. Dancers often felt that there were online b-boys who were not really present, or known, in the local scene.

Here are a few of the tensions that I have observed, arising from this feeling of the times. Breaking in various places had remained relatively unpopular, underground and/or insular from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s. There was a sense that everyone knew each other. On the other hand, b-boys and b-girls appearing online were not familiar, and thus could not be seen as experts or as having any experience on which to base their opinions. It was often younger dancers who appeared online, sharing opinions and thoughts that portrayed a novice quality. The fact that they were younger meant that they had not grown up into the same expectations of how reputation is acquired; were not familiar enough with the codes to know what may be misconstrued, and often were 'bedroom' dancers, or those who practised in their high school but had not taken the dance further publicly in local competitions. On the other hand, being young, they had a seamless familiarity with the processes of the Internet. In many ways, those who originally were seen as 'internet b-boys' or 'e-boys' were actually fans of the dance, who also practised, although maybe not to the acceptable standards of experts or more serious competitors. They had not (yet) built their reputations through winning battles. Those that were involved in the scene developed online aliases, to pirate b-boy videos from the earliest days. Many were also younger b-boys who would come up the ranks, and in doing so, naturalise their online banter and activities. However they were

of the generation that grew up with the Internet, and it was natural for them to express themselves in that forum; one which was still somewhat alien to their elders.

In the current climate of breaking, the use of online forums has become acceptable and regulated. The UK b-boy forum, for example, tends to focus on upcoming events, file sharing of event footage, results of past events, etc. Sometimes battles or arguments between b-boys are spawned online, and other times peace is made there. In the current time period, the same b-boy often comments on a UK b-boy forum website about results of events, and to advertise up-coming shows. Likewise, most of the dancers that I interviewed and spoke with all have their own personal MySpace and Facebook pages. These are almost always completely devoted to, and/or referring to breaking. They include descriptions of the music they listen to, how they define themselves in the 'about me' sections (i.e. I'm a b-boy or b-girl), their favourite films such as *Freshest Kids* (Israel 2002), *Style Wars* (Silver 1983); books such as *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (Chang 2005), *We B\*Girlz* (Cooper and Kramer 2005) top friends (mostly other dancers), and embedded clips. These clips include footage of themselves dancing, pioneers talking about the dance, and pictures. The profile pictures often showcase either the b-boy or b-girl doing a freeze or posing with other dancers in a 'b-boy stance'.

When dancers are representing themselves online they are not only having a conversation with other dancers in distant places, but also with dancers locally, in their own city. For example, the UK b-boy forum is a regional forum where information about the local context is circulated. Montreal,

Toronto, and Halifax in Canada all have their own forums as well. This is a way of talking about the dance, akin, in particular respects, to the way dancers may talk to each other in person.

A crew may also create a website or blog to represent themselves, in the hope of getting jobs, becoming more known commercially, or as an opportunity to disseminate knowledge and history about hip hop culture. One of the earliest websites for b-boys, with a forum, was created by Toronto's Bag of Trix crew. The forum part of the website became so heated that eventually the conflicts that arose online caused the web team to shut down the site. While the website ran, the mouthing off of one b-boy to another became so heated, that local battles actually began online and found their physical combat moment at the next event that happened after the online comments. In this way, the Internet forever changed the initiation of battles and extended the lead up to infamous battles between b-boys with a personal conflict at the core.

As both areas of communication, the local and the global, developed over time within the Internet communities, it became clear that both ways of talking, one to the 'in' group and one to the outside world, became conventions. Forums that are intended for b-boys, and are created by them, are areas where internal debates happen. On the other hand, on websites intended for commercial work, including event websites, hip hop is often defended and presented as a cohesive, agreeable group with a shared outlook worthy of prestige.

Group identification is a complex sociological concept. As philosopher Francis Sparshott (1995) points out, Jean Paul Sartre describes three types of group identifications. First there is the 'in' group with which you identify. That

is one type of belonging to a group, and is represented through websites such as the UK b-boy forum. Second, a group of people all planning to do a certain activity can be classified as a group. For example, people that are all standing at a bus stop. This analogy may actually reveal a great deal about how b-boys and b-girls often feel about each other; that they have nothing in common, except perhaps a shared vehicle of transportation – the dance – with which they are all going to different places without any common values. And third, people may be considered as a group, as organised by those outside the group as such. B-boys and b-girls debate amongst themselves, as an ‘in’ group, about things that they would not discuss whilst talking to people considered as part of an outside group. The outside group may classify anyone that does a style remotely similar to breaking in movement, fashion or setting as ‘street dance,’ ‘breakdancing’ or urban dance. This is not how the group member’s would self-identify. With these aspects in mind, I discuss some of the ways that events are represented online.

### Representing Breaking Online

In this section, I use a recent example (2007) of the way breaking is represented online in the promotion of an international breaking competition. The UK B-Boy Champs event website<sup>6</sup> is a promotional site where information and products are made available to the general public. I argue that the event’s success hinges upon a balance between an appeal to spectators and sponsors, and an appeal to b-boys and b-girls or ‘insiders.’ This is a mutual reliance. The

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<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.bboychampionships.com/>> [Accessed March 1, 2008]

‘authentic lifestyle’ is part of the selling point for spectators. Alongside the attraction value of the sheer spectacle, sponsorship is an economic lifeline for the participants (it allows the events to happen) and provides them with a profile and a venue for the playing out of their international reputations.

The reputation of a breaking event depends on the quality of the b-boys who show up for the event to dance. B-boys and b-girls will agree to perform at events for money, friendship and/or exposure. With larger events, the b-boys and b-girls have an invested interest in appearing outside the ‘commercialisation’ or ‘misrepresentation’ of the dance, as an art form and lifestyle. However, international, professional participants, who rely on the support of sponsors and major event organisers, always intentionally misconstrue this appearance of ‘authenticity’<sup>7</sup>. If they are competing, their reputation depends on how well they dance in the battles. They either need to win, or to impress everyone with their flavour and individual style. Their memorability and ability to be recognisable, from event to event, increase their chances of building a name for themselves. As mentioned before, the visibility of b-boys and b-girls on videos and the Internet is central to their exposure. The proliferation of breaking videos worldwide, in remote corners especially, is directly connected with the website as a purchasing vehicle, alongside widening distribution channels.

Although the website for the event is intended for a broad audience,

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<sup>7</sup> In my interviews with b-boys and b-girls, their sponsorships were the most difficult subject to get them to speak about. However, a few explained to me that the most important aspect of negotiating with their sponsor is to make sure that both get something out of the arrangement.

including outsiders to the dance, it is remarkable how much of the discussion is organised around the interests and debates of the breaking world. I will raise some of these examples later on. Some of the tensions between creating a website for 'insiders' to the culture and 'outsiders' or spectators can be understood historically as there was not a lot of accurate information about the dance, or agreed upon knowledge, until reputations had been established over many years.

The UK B-Boy Championships originally had a reputation for being inauthentic amongst insiders<sup>8</sup>; a commercial enterprise that was very detached from the 'real' street culture. The reasons for this widespread opinion within the breaking community are pretty basic. First, the event was originally called the 'breakdance' championships. The term 'breakdance' was, and still is, deemed inappropriate by many participants of the dance because of its association with inaccurate media accounts that provided this as an umbrella term for different and very distinct dance styles from both coasts of the U.S.A. Second, the first videos that were produced involved cuts in camera angles that happened in the middle of a dancer's set, so you could not see the complete movement. This indicated that the marketing was designed for an assumed novice audience that would be bored without impressive editing. This unfortunately frustrated b-boy consumers, especially novices who likely wanted to learn moves through watching the videos. Third, there was no room to participate at the event. If you were not in one of the international crews performing onstage, then you were merely an onlooker in a stadium theatre,

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<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence with b-boys from the USA, UK and Canada in 2007.



organised on angled seating. That means that, for the audience, there are no flat surfaces on which to dance. This is an ideal design for seeing the stage but only for spectators. This third problem has been 'corrected' in some ways by the organisers, who chose a new venue for part of the event in 2007 to facilitate participation by paying ticket holders.

The way the website has been used to validate and promote the authenticity of this particular event will first be discussed by introducing some visual cues on the layout of the front page of the UK b-boy champs website, as it was in 2007. On the main page, across the top there are selections for 'home, 2007, video, MySpace, forum and store.' Beneath this there are options to click on the following: emcees, solo b-boys, poppers, crews, lockers, judges and DJs. Each picture icon option is accompanied by words on top. The icon is of either one man, or a crew of male dancers.

The sponsors are listed to the left, as logos, including the main sponsor of the event, 'Sony Ericsson.' In fact, the website is addressed as 'the official website of the Sony Ericsson UK B-Boy Championships'. The appearance of the sponsor in the title of the event is a significant sign of commercialisation. The sponsor's overt strategy puts its company's brand in opposition to the 'insider' appeal that many event organisers, who began as participants in the scene, have used to warrant the authenticity of their event. Many other sponsors of individual b-boys and crews choose to make their branding less overt<sup>9</sup>. They provide clothing for the dancers but avoid major logos or brand recognition, in

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<sup>9</sup> Information from personal correspondence with festival organizers and b-boys on tour internationally in 2009.

the hopes of achieving a more 'authentic' affiliation

In the centre of the page there is a video clip featuring highlights from event footage. The video clip has title sequences, music, and title-worthy shots of dancers. Against a black backdrop, individual dancers are featured. They are not dancing, just gesturing and looking stern for the most part. Halfway through a b-boy's power move combination, the backdrop transitions into a stage. The moving pictures of the b-boys tend to focus on their facial expressions, which tend to show elements of concentration and/or confidence. It is not immediately clear what they are focusing on. The visual evidence would indicate that they are thinking about the move they are going to do or the movements they are doing: they are inwardly focussed. For those presenting these visual cues, the high levels of concentration by the performers is likely meant to express the high degree of skill and difficulty of the moves they are about to do. This is the opposite of the b-boy aesthetic, where b-boys learn to make difficult moves look easy.

Below the video clip, the text reads, "DVD out now and shipping" and thumbnails of the sleeves of the DVD are included. It is advertised as an 'official documentary' and the fact that it is 'uncut' is mentioned, indicating that their market for the videos is mainly b-boys. There is graffiti present in the imagery. All the sponsors are listed again on the back of the DVD sleeve, where a link to the website is also provided. There is a listing of the two days of events, and participants' names and countries.

On the right side of the page there is an interactive game, 'U Battle.' Below is a write-up about the 'evolution of the champs.' I will include the text in

full before making some points about it:

Welcome to the new look B-Boy Championships...

In order to keep the battle format over 2 days and have a place for everyone to meet up, dance in the circles & party, we will hold this year's Championships in 2 different venues.

Day 1, the "Knock-out Jam" will be at the Ocean Music Venue in Hackney.

Day 2, "The World Finals" will be at our annual home the Brixton Academy.

The programme on day 1 are the knock-out stages (1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds) for the solo b-boy, solo popping and 2 on 2 locking battles. There will also be a footwork battle, Seven 2 Smoke battle & of course the open b-boy circles for everyone to dance & jam and plenty of seating upstairs, if you want to watch all the action as it happens!

Day 2, at Brixton, will be the "World Finals", plus the full World B-Boy Crew competition. Other features will be the 90's comp, beatbox battle & Crazy Leg's fresh awards! It's a great programme over both days and the response to the new format has been wicked! The B-Boy Champs is a truly unique event, annually attracting thousands of people. The genuine emotion of the greatest dancers, battling on the ultimate stage is one not to be missed!!

We'll see you all there! ([www.bboychampionships.com](http://www.bboychampionships.com))

There are a few aspects of this that should be emphasised. First, the marketing attempt is obvious. They have changed venues so that dancers, or 'insiders', will hopefully attend the event and feel that they can also participate. This makes it more attractive for spectators who also want to be involved. When

I told dancers from Scotland that I was going to attend, for research purposes, they warned me that there would be no room to dance. None of them were planning to go, although they would often travel to other cities such as Leeds, Newcastle and London for other, smaller breaking events.

The organisers have clearly tried to deal with this feedback and improve the event to continue marketing it to a portion of their audience that is smaller: practicing b-boys. This also demonstrates how quickly the feedback loop can change event formats, venues, names, etc. The website also encourages the reader by emphasising that there will be plenty of events to participate in, and simultaneously makes sure that spectators know there is plenty of room to watch, upstairs. Cross-marketing here is clearly a challenge. The second-day list mentions features of the stage show, including types of battles, and informs the reader that ‘thousand of people’ attend annually.

The dancers, judges, and emcees are promoted in curious ways. I will systematically describe how each group is promoted on the website. These descriptions reveal what value judgements are seen to validate the participants on stage. Descriptions also familiarise the general public with participants and their credentials. The pioneering New York City b-boy, Crazy Legs, who emcees the event every year, is discussed in the following ways:

1. How long he has been dancing,
2. His crew affiliations and theatrical productions,
3. Appearances in films, commercials and music videos,
4. Awards won,
5. Off-Broadway choreography for rap artists,

6. Carnegie Hall performance and tours (extensive and world wide).

His volunteer work is mentioned and the events he has hosted. Crazy Legs is the most well known b-boy outside the b-boy community, because of his appearances, charisma, signature moves and recognisability from the early 1980s explosion of the dance.

The write-up of the other emcee, Afrika Islam, contains not as many credentials in various arenas, but points out four key aspects worthy of note:

1. He is originally from the South Bronx,
2. He was taught by Afrika Bambaataa,
3. He invented 'gangsta rap' (musical genre),
4. He has platinum albums, movie awards and Oscars.

Here the ties to music are clearly emphasised, as well as place of origins and lineage of informal education, and commercial successes. The validation of performers by commercial successes will become even more apparent with the dancers, who are often validated by appearances specifically in commercials.

Solo b-boys are described through:

1. Competitions won,
2. How long they have been dancing,
3. Their age, country, name, crew affiliations,
4. Names/styles of moves that are unique to them.

One dancer, Junior, is described as, "the most viewed b-boy on the internet!"

Another is described in ways that reveal particular values; these have nothing to do with fashion at all but rather express the music, though the site does not mention which type of music. Others are described in boxing terms, as

“contenders”, and their results from other years are mentioned, as well as how “hungry” they are to win. Some lesser-known b-boys are simply described as the solo contender who has won elimination rounds for the event in their own countries. References are made to the emerging scenes in Russia and the Ukraine.

Commercials are an achievement with which dancers are credited in this promotional arena and, oddly, the commercials are listed by company i.e. so-and-so has been in commercials for Samsung, Nike, Sprite, etc. This list of accomplishments through commercials has similar qualities to descriptions of art photographers, who often describe making it when their photo appears in a two-page advertisement for a product in a magazine.

The judges however are described in terms of what appears to be a defence of their qualifications for judging. Cros 1 is described as an event organiser and clothing shop owner, distributor and producer of DVDs, club promoter and DJ. The connections to larger elements of hip-hop culture are evident. Extreme is described as ‘legendary’, his crew affiliations are mentioned, we are told he is, “more than qualified” although not from the U.S. He is described as a former competitor, who is internationally respected. B-boy Mouse is described as the best in the UK. He is also described as injured, which explains why he is not competing himself. His style is described; he has the credibility to pass judgement on his peers. There is also mention of what he will be looking for in competitors. B-boy Focus is described as, “raw” and associated with, “cyphers”. He is a real b-boy, credited with bringing back b-boying, and Suga Pop is described in terms of his music productions.

The DJs tend to be described by how long they have been doing it. With all of the judges and emcees, there are links to their personal websites at the bottom of the biographies, and most links to MySpace sites, online stores that they run, and crew sites. MySpace sites are not given for the competitors who come from a variety of places. Instead, there are pictures of country flags next to each of them.

Countries represented for solo performers include the USA, Korea, Algeria, Ukraine, France, Holland, Finland, Canada, Australia, China, and Japan. Countries that have more than one competitor for the solos are the USA, Korea and France. The only woman represented is from Japan, and is part of a male/female locking crew. The popping battle includes dancers from the USA, France, Japan, UK and Germany, Finland, Philippines (a Bay Area dancer), Korea and China. Most countries mentioned boast at least two contenders. The website also gives the Championship results from the previous year, including who was in the final battles and who won. The other important aspect to note is that the website links to a site where you can purchase DVDs, hats, t-shirts, mix CDs, vinyl and more. There is a secondary use in making products available online through the website. This makes the website an online hub, that can be visited throughout the year, thus increasing the remembrance of audiences for an annual event. Annual events often struggle to maintain the interest of their market during the off-season. To combat this, many organisers attempt to throw qualifiers or smaller parties, to build the recognition and renown of their event

continuously<sup>10</sup>.

The success of the event depends upon the quality of the crews and participants that show up. Therefore, the event's reputation relies on maintaining a good treatment of the dancers, judges and DJs, while simultaneously building an audience for the event. The more engaged the audience is with the individual b-boys and b-girls, as 'fans,' the more likely they will be to attend the event. The website helps to navigate these positions by representing and promoting individuals, whilst educating audiences on the b-boy/b-girl perspective. They do not always get it right, but they have an invested interest in trying to. I have demonstrated this through the adjustments and clarifications about 'a new direction' that the UK B-boy Championships have taken over time.

#### Products and Sponsors

Some authors have claimed that the reason breaking fell out of popularity is because people could not figure out how to profit from the dance (see especially Gilroy 1997 in Fogarty 2006). This is often compared to music: rap music has a product, dance does not. This is interesting to consider in the changing climate where the live music sector is thriving, and record sales are said to be down (Frith 2007). Breaking performances often happen at live events where merchandise is sold similar to what you might find at a rock concert. Event t-shirts are sold, beer as well, and other paraphernalia like event

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<sup>10</sup> Personal correspondence with local event organizer, and emcee for annual international events, London, England, 2009.



video footage.

Merchandise is also sold online. The B-boy Summit, another annual international b-boy/b-girl event that takes place in the US, has a link for 'merchandise' as well. Similar to the UK B-boy Championship website in format, the B-Boy Summit's home page advertises DVDs and features some major areas including the history of the B-boy Summit, photo galleries, *We B-girlz* interview with event organiser, Asia One, Summit news and the B-Boy Summit store. There are no obvious references to outside sponsors on the home page. The categories to link to include: "Summit info; audio & video; photo gallery; showcase; merchandise and links." Also there is a copyright at the bottom for Asia One's *No Easy Props* Productions, with a notice that the site is, "all rights reserved through Sensimedia".

Both the UK B-Boy Championships, and B-boy Summit websites share commonalities in the type of information they provide, even though it is likely that within the scene these two events (both large) are understood in contrast with each other. The UK B-Boy Championships is more of a commercial enterprise, with sponsors and commercial successes emphasised, and the B-Boy Summit is an event that began in 1994 that clearly emphasises b-boy/b-girl values and community. The distinction between the founding reputations of these two events is determined by the experience of the event organisers. The organisers of B-Boy Summit are also known dancers in the scene<sup>11</sup>, which changes their perspective, knowledge and reputation immediately for b-boy

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<sup>11</sup> B-girl Asia One was beginning to make a name for herself and her partner at the time, EasyRoc, was a well-known member of Rocksteady Crew. (Ken Swift Q&A at Pioneers workshop in London, England at Sadler's Wells, 2010)

audiences. This is not necessarily the case for non-b-boy spectators.

One last website to mention, Germany's Battle of the Year, has similar links, emphasis, values and sponsors. One area that they focus on, however, that the other two websites do not, involves fixed rules for their event, with a page about battle regulations and another about the judging system for the event (as mentioned in the last chapter). Local organisers in various countries around the world, who set up preliminary events to pick crews for the world championships, are asked to follow the rules seriously to be fair. The rules discuss the format of the battles, with suggested time limits, how to pick the best showcase, the maximum length of shows, and the maximum number of crewmembers. Also crews have to be 'real': they have to dance, practice and perform together besides preparations for competition. Individual dancers can only join one national or international elimination, local organisers cannot participate as competitors, and the jury needs to consist of 3-5 members, one of whom is from the BOTY judging team.

### Distinct Markets: Field Note Observations

When I arrived at the UK B-Boy Championship event in 2007 there were two lines outside. One was a V.I.P. line that consisted of dancers and people from the hip hop community. They were clearly marked out through their fashion. This line also seemed to be more multicultural in appearance. The V.I.P.s were all waiting to enter by a backdoor.

In the regular line to get in, which went all around the building, the audience could be described more as, "your typical rock concert audience." This

is how it was articulated to me when discussing the line with a fellow ticket holder. The range of fashion styles indicated that there was no one style, and the age and gender of those in line also ranged widely.

DJ Timber, who plays at many of the b-boy events in the UK and Ireland, was cruising up and down the line with his mix CDs, trying to sell these to the regular public waiting in line. When I got in the door, the audience conventions also resembled concert going: younger kids and fans were closer to the stage, and older audience members tended to stand closer to the bar, ordering beer and cheering for b-boys that they felt represented them. Amusingly, it was the scrawny white b-boy who was dressed in fashion more akin to 'regular' wear than in particularly 'hip hop' clothing, but was successfully winning on stage, that was crowd favourite for the British, predominantly white crowd, hanging out near the back where I stood to watch.

### Concluding Remarks

Consensus in art worlds is, arguably, one of the activities that build a participant's reputation (Becker 1982). In the last chapter I mentioned that international networks, and travel to new countries, could also help to establish reputation. For b-boys and b-girls though, interestingly, there is no individual 'work' or performance that is named as the 'art work' that established a dancer's reputation. Reputations are built over time and discussed along the way through conversations. Recognition is built from winning battles, not typically from appearing on theatrical stages, although professionals will often do both. However, the closest equivalent to art criticism I could find for

breaking battles in 2007 was promotional material on event websites about particular dancers<sup>12</sup>.

Reputation has to do with *aesthetic* considerations that remain ill articulated. In other words, the reputations of b-boys and b-girls are built upon the *aesthetic* approval and support of their peers (recognition), as well as by the support of event organisers and audiences (renown). Yet, the representation of their achievements is outlined, online, through their involvement in commercials, events and where they come from. This is one area of breaking worlds that will change with time. And, like the history of modern dance in America<sup>13</sup>, the critical discourse is now developing through the involvement of enthusiasts. However, instead of theatrical criticism in newspapers, these developments have been occurring online<sup>14</sup>.

This chapter acknowledges that written criticism of breaking does exist, although it is often in the form of promotional, online sources. The reputations of b-boys and b-girls are contested online, and dancers offer competing explanations of the history, value and meaning of their dance. As demonstrated, Internet websites for international events are also significant in their attempts to acknowledge the spectators of breaking culture, and to make transparent

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<sup>12</sup> This resembled one of James Elkins' (2003) categories of art criticism, the promotional pamphlets that accompany a show at an art gallery. He argues that art criticism has been on the decline but is still evident in these pamphlets supplied at art showings.

<sup>13</sup> See Conner (1997) for an excellent account of the development of criticism for modern dance. Conner argues that enthusiasts of the dance style used newspaper reviews to educate audiences on the aesthetics of that style.

<sup>14</sup> Recent examples have begun to emerge of more articulated evaluations of b-boys and b-girls. This includes the online source: "More Than A Stance." It is one of the first highly evolved online b-boy magazines and includes interviews with b-boys and b-girls that are accessible, as well as event highlights. <<http://morethanastance.com/>> [Accessed August 23, 2010]

some of the codes and values of the dance. This is done to assist an understanding of, or possibly even a developing connoisseurship for a form that prides itself in having, “its own aesthetic,” even as it’s uses are also clearly for corporations to sell clothes, phones, and soft drinks.

## Section V: Conclusions



## Chapter 12: Steadily Building

There's some people that come to the table to eat and then there's some people that *made* that table, that actually cooked in the kitchen and set the table and served it in its form., who made the food for everybody to eat, *everybody*, didn't matter, everybody... and then there's the people that eat. Ok. What are you? You gotta ask yourself, are you one of the people that cook and set the table and make the food and make the nourishing things for other people or are you one of the people that sits there and just eats<sup>1</sup>.

- Remind, Style Elements crew

This thesis began by describing the international scale of breaking culture, as it has developed in the years since its beginnings in New York City in the 1970s. It has shown the ways in which taste and judgement have been key factors in this development, in establishing the aesthetic conventions of the culture that are produced, stabilised, translated and circulated cross-culturally. It has also shown the central role of music for this dance practice, and the ways in which music permeates matters of taste and judgement. Indeed, part of my goal with this work has been to argue that dance is a performance of musical tastes, where these tastes are often in competition with one another. Indeed breaking has grown into an established international activity with a particularly competitive aesthetic.

These claims propose a particular view of breaking culture which has been constructed in three broad spans. The claim that breaking has developed

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<sup>1</sup> "The Crumbs Chronicles (Webisode 1) 6/7" by Donnie Counts  
<<http://vimeo.com/7033519>> [Accessed December 18, 2010]



internationally through the gradual consolidation of collective standards is the work of chapters four through six. Here I develop a new approach to the ideas of taste and competence, and show that this consolidation of collective standards has taken place through the social and historical traditions that constitute breaking culture. The importance of crews, and their familial accretion of generations is explored, and musical taste is shown to be diverse, negotiable, tutored and even, at times, inspirational within the shifting stylistic developments in the dance.

This discussion of taste and changing tastes leads to my claim that dance is a performance of musical tastes, with all that statement implies about the hitherto neglected place of dance in popular music scholarship. This is the work of chapters seven through nine, where music and dance are brought together in a consideration of different situations where taste and judgement work together to cultivate a comparative aesthetic experience. In claiming that breaking can rightly be considered an art, and an art that displays the pleasures not only of the body, but also of comparison as a framework for judging artistic practices that should be taken seriously.

Finally, I show the ways in which actual judgements, and systems of judgement have been developed and discussed in ever changing modes of technological and musical mediation. This is the work of chapters ten and eleven, where I claim that, in breaking, *comparison* takes its place as a foundational aspect of an aesthetic appreciation. I show that this idea, prefigured in the aesthetic theories of certain Enlightenment philosophers but transformed here to a performance context, gives a better account of an art

based so clearly around judgement and competition, than does the idea of a disinterested, transcendental aesthetic based on Kantian notions. I also show how judgement has become a part of the very infrastructure of a dance practice that continues to change and develop.

All of the different contexts and aspirations of the dance are the result of competing perspectives and preferences, and the internationalisation of the dance has allowed for many distinct voices to contribute to particular phases. However, it is also clear that breaking is not just about competing tastes, but is as much about the development of internationally agreed frameworks. These are needed for the competitive events and other types of performances which are central to the culture. The ambition to standardise judgements is a recent development in breaking culture that demonstrates not only its international maturity, but also how tumultuous and difficult it is to articulate the tacit knowledge involved in the collective work of breaking.

#### Judgement, Accountability and Contribution

As this thesis has shown, international competitions were once judged on the *preferences* of those who had made their mark on the dance, and who had left a legacy, and therefore represented a tradition. As the competition circuit developed, alongside other outlets for artistic expression such as the theatre and video mediation, top competitors began to express concerns for judgements to be transparent, or at least accountable.

Those who put in the perspiration of the dance, the work of it, wanted to know that they were being judged fairly by a generation of dancers that had

come before them and who had their own sense of aesthetic judgement. Those earlier generations, as I have demonstrated, often had very strict cultural values, epitomised by prohibitions such as not 'biting' each other's moves, or, in the case of dancers from Toronto, having an emphasis on one aspect of performance, such as originality. The new competitions demanded different sorts of group cohesion and performance, and consequently a split has occurred, between those who aspire to compete in international events, and those who aspire to dance at local competitions that are *for* dancers.

What is interesting here is that the standardisation of judgement in breaking competitions involves dancers moving out of the realm of judgement and into the realm of 'architecture,' that is the creation of the very structures and organisations through which judgements will be mediated. Whether this is the development of explicit rules of the game, of aesthetic meanings cultivated in the classroom, or of rule breaking as a sign of individualism, dancers move beyond performances of tastes to construction of meaning. As Remind asked in the opening remarks of this chapter, "You gotta ask yourself, are you one of the people that cook and set the table and make the food and make the nourishing things for other people or are you one of the people that sits there and just eats?"

The key term that sums up the implications of Remind's comment is *contribution*. This is an interesting assertion about culture, in this case hip hop culture and dance practices: a culture of participation requires tangible contributions that involve a notion of 'giving back' to others, through adequate development of the infrastructure that supports the dance form.

## Judgement in Popular Culture

Taste and judgement have been central to the arguments of this thesis, while coincidentally, judgement has also come to centre stage in popular television in recent years. Talent competitions have flooded the TV channels of various countries, providing a spectacle of performance and judgement that makes explicit some of the points to which I have been drawing attention here. In international breaking competitions, formal judgement began as something casual. Judges with reputations were invited to express their own personal taste, deciding which b-boy or b-girl they thought won a battle. As the stakes were increased, however, and competitors and sponsors demanded more credibility and accountability, breaking went through different phases. At some points, routines were negotiated (what is acceptable for teamwork) and execution was over-valued (as a way to be accountable easily). But judges have moulded and changed the descriptions of what they want to see, in a way to keep things fresh for themselves. They have told competitors what they think they are lacking, like the TV judges do, and the culture has been shaped accordingly.

Judgement here takes on a serious tone. Breaking events are accountable for picking good judges, to even the playing field for competitors. They do so to appeal to competitors and to ensure that they can get the best b-boys and b-girls possible at their events. The reputations of events depend on their ability to attract dancers, while navigating the involvement of sponsors and audience support. Judges' reputations depend on their abilities to convince other

participants that their judgement matters. This involves refreshing and updating their reputations, staying current to shifts in the scene and being popular amongst event organisers. A judge needs to be seen as someone who can become family, but a family member who is expected to show up on time and be reliable. At events, the family has extended, the way it might at a family reunion. Different relationships define belonging, both explicitly and implicitly, as dancers get older and begin to contribute to the infrastructure of the culture.

In a quotation at the very start of this thesis, Michael Holman argued, erroneously, that the dance and style of breaking were uniquely American and could not be mastered out of context. Many dancers I interviewed from around the world mentioned meeting b-boys from New York City who, agreeing with these perceptions, refused to credit anyone from outside of that city for their abilities or understandings of the dance.

This idea of a dance being taken out of context undergoes a curious reversal during the course of the thesis. Francis Sparshott (1995) suggested that dance, unlike other arts, is so firmly rooted in perceptions of specific localities that people assume dance must be observed in its own habitat. This seems to follow Wittgenstein (2007) where he suggested that when there are rules to a particular game, those who are from a foreign or alien country could never play that game because they cannot understand the context properly. In an essay entitled, "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas," Bourdieu (in Shusterman 1999) similarly suggested that, "many misunderstandings in international communication are a result of the fact that texts do not bring their context with them" (221). He added that a foreign

culture could play the part that 'posterity' usually does: in the consecration of an art form, its acceptance and appreciation by another culture could verify its legitimacy in a way that the passage of time was often argued to do. This is the reverse of how I have shown breaking to be evidenced in my conversations with informants. Although they saw the continued, or newly formed interest in breaking in countries such as Germany and Japan as being 'behind' the trends, or out of context, at a critical point dancers began to look to these countries for inspiration. Here the foreign cultures are consecrated by the appreciation of others in the new internationalisation of the dance

International competitions have emphasised and exaggerated national identities. In consequence, I think that the most difficult transition for sociology to undergo will involve not only a theorisation of international contexts, as attempted by the project of Inglis and Robertson (2008), but also theorisations that emerge from this multi-sited context at the level of empirical research.

#### Architects not artefacts

Cultural policy in France supports hip hop theatre dance groups on stage - American West Coast b-boys and b-girls make underground videos describing their own aesthetic cultivations and the relation of these to their individual musical tastes - b-boy, Ken Swift, among others, considers the art of breaking to be inspired by the mediated experiences of martial arts (Bruce Lee is taken seriously, and their popular cultural dance form is taken just as seriously.)

Breaking is about work not works. The art is found in daily practice, more so than in 'works' on stage. The notion of the complete or finished work

holds little weight in a consideration of breaking, even as breaking has shifted beyond a vernacular dance and into a theatrical and artistic one, thus edging this analysis away from contemporary debates in cultural sociology. Here, art is an everyday practice, in accounts of the dance by dancers themselves, and one that is always mediated through language and the participation of b-boys and b-girls from different parts of the world. The authority of participants is also subject to trends and fashions that are short-lived and cyclical.

My aim here is to make sociological accounts and theories useful through the application of ideas to a practice. In other words, the ideas in this thesis are introduced to a debate happening not within the discipline of sociology but within the discipline of the dance culture – or at least this is the effort embedded in what relates loosely to *applied* ethnomusicology. Studies engaged in conversations with the community, to be studied by and accessible to multiple audiences are crucial. And breaking will be quick to borrow, from any source, useful models in the articulation of the daily value judgements that define and constantly revive the dance in its variety of different social contexts.

Old school b-boys and b-girls, who have remained in the game as active participants, are seen as the ‘architects’ of the dance. They refine and refresh the dance through their teaching, and through the adjustments they make in their teaching to continually challenge young b-boys. Storm described how he told South Korean b-boys to dance to the music, and came back six months later to find that a large majority of the top crews could now hit beats in power moves; an effort perfected to a technical level and mastery that had never been seen before. His pleasure and laughter as he asked, “what should I tell them to do

next?" demonstrates a love for the new developments and unpredictable achievements that continue to amaze older b-boys and b-girls, and spectators, as breaking continues its internationalisation. Other b-boys from America, like Poe One and Ken Swift, shape the minds of younger breakers worldwide as they articulate what the dance means to them, with new and clever analogies and responses that are developing all the time. Finally newer b-boys, like Dyzee from Canada, attempt to articulate their own understanding of local 're-workings' of the dance, such as the developments in Toronto by crews such as Bag of Trix and Boogie Brats, that earned them a place in the videos and live tours of the 1990s. Simultaneously, he is hoping to develop a fair framework of judgement for international competitions by also understanding the New York City foundations and histories that set the whole culture up<sup>2</sup>.

In the end, the dancers are architects not the producers of artefacts. They are not explained away by the 'work of art', or by art works on theatrical stages. Battles are where dancers achieve their reputations and status in breaking culture, and cyphers are where b-boys and b-girls prove their endurance and longevity. While young b-boys and b-girls may have limited moves, enough to get them through a set amount of rounds in a competition, older b-boys and b-girls are just getting warmed up after seven rounds in a cypher at a local event. These values trace to some of the original contexts of the dance: where it was done and what it was *for*.

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<sup>2</sup> See some of the various participants of this research project, among others, who are endorsing a legitimate system of judgment for international competitions as a community effort here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfPRHEAk8gw> [Accessed June 20, 2011]



These observations raise new challenges for conceptualisations of art and the centrality of the 'work' in art worlds. As Jonzi D explains, hip hop *is* the *contemporary dance* of our times. And however self-centred and self-indulgent hip hop artists seem, often perceived to be seeing their narrow crevice of the world as monumentally significant and all encompassing, this radical vision is what has kept alive some of the most interesting aspects of the dance; the aspects that make it able to be understood, as judged by its 'own' aesthetic. However, as I hope I have also demonstrated, its 'own' aesthetic has been shaped by the involvement of many outsiders, who have promoted, challenged, influenced and sometimes mutated the meanings of the dance.

Nowhere is this more evident than with the question of musical taste, seen to be the essence of a best performance of the dance practice, yet not necessarily represented as a coherent standard. This is the result not only of the outsider status of the dance, but also of 'outsiders' to this 'outsider' dance, who have shaped the meaning nevertheless. Those outsiders are the b-boys and b-girls who represent the dance internationally in many cities around the world today. And their abilities to win international contests are a testament to the insiders of the dance who taught them, and who in doing so created an *extended family*. This challenges quick assertions of appropriation and instead raises the issue of education and situates this at the forefront of analysis.

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## Appendices



## Appendix A

### Ethnographic field notes: Edinburgh, Scotland 2007

During my first few months in Scotland, I was able to make contact with local b-boys and b-girls in the Edinburgh scene. When I first arrived in Edinburgh, the first people (non-dancers) that I met consistently recommended *Dance Base*, the National Centre for Dance in Scotland. When I visited the centre for the first time, I immediately met a local b-boy/teacher who was in the lobby. He kindly suggested various club nights and local practice spots. And, like many of my participants in the UK he asked the question, “if you want to study breaking, why are you *here*?” (as opposed to other countries with more well-known or influential dancers<sup>1</sup>). He also introduced me to other b-boys and a b-girl at a practice that took place at the Commonwealth Pool, and from then on I attended local practices and events, as well as the occasional club night.

As I was often on my own in the beginning, appearing at club nights and practices, it was difficult for the local dancers to see me in a comprehensible context. By a rare turn of fate, one of my friends, who was a b-boy from back home in Canada, came to Edinburgh for the wedding of a close friend of his: a Canadian man who was marrying a Scottish woman. He stayed at my flat for a few weeks because he wanted to spend time checking out Scotland and the

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, when I was researching in Berlin, a local German b-boy asked why I was studying the scene there when I could be studying breaking in Toronto, Canada! He had been there on a trip and thought the scene was more vibrant there.

breaking scene. I told him about an event that was happening at a local club: a one-on-one breaking battle<sup>2</sup>. He decided to enter, and I went to the club with him. When I arrived, a local b-girl called me out for an informal battle. Being significantly out of shape, recovering from a serious injury, and thus out of training form, I hadn't come 'prepared for the battle.' I stood my ground but minimised the attitude, having the desire to 'get in' with the locals. We went five rounds<sup>3</sup> or so and at one point my friend from back home held up two fingers to the b-girl to point out that she'd already done a move and was repeating it. I grabbed his fingers and told him not to do that, thinking it may be perceived as rude and might lessen my chances of appearing friendly enough for future conversations and interviews.

This embodied experience is significant for several reasons. First, my position as a researcher was changing the way that I battled, both in gesture and awareness. Second, a previous injury had seriously shaken my abilities and my confidence to dance and I wasn't yet committed to continuing with my practice. Although I had gone to practices, I was not dancing with full effort, so the b-boys and b-girls hadn't seen me 'dance' yet. There is a distinction between how I dance in practice and how I perform publicly in a battle. These are different

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<sup>2</sup> A one-on-one breaking battle is a competition where one individual will compete against another. Sometimes when crews enter a formal competition members of the same crew will end up battling each other. A two-on-two battle is, similarly, for two participants to battle another two, etc.

<sup>3</sup> A 'round' is terminology used to describe a battle where each dancer takes a turn. For example, one round would be when a b-girl dances and I respond. Some formal battles announce at the beginning how many 'rounds' there will be. Other battles are time-based which means that the battle continues for a specific amount of minutes. If this is the case, emcees and event organisers generally make sure that each crew or individual has had an equal amount of rounds. For example, the crew that begins the battle will not be the same crew that finishes it.

types of performances. Third, my research persona, which was still developing, interfered with my concentration as a dancer.

After this informal battle, one of the event organisers' crew members asked me if I would enter the one-on-one competition. I said no. He said that they were short a b-boy so it would really help them out if I would, so then I agreed. I then began to worry that if the local dancers saw my style, which is both unconventional and foreign, this would change the nature of our future conversations. Also, my mindset and preparation for the battle were not in a usual state. Normally, before a battle, I go through some kind of ritual preparations; this time I was having an existential researcher crisis.

As the story goes, I battled. A song came on that I liked so I was feeling good. The b-boy on the microphone said some encouraging words about my 'footwork' during my performance and I won the battle. When the judges announced that I won, the b-boy on the microphone said that he had never seen someone look so disappointed to win a battle.

Anyone who has ever battled knows that it's hard to be objective after this. You get feelings towards your opponent because things come out in battles, namely what they 'really' think of your dancing<sup>4</sup> and your choices for style and moves. You get feelings about the judges: who said you won and who didn't. You may even be bitter towards the DJ if they play a musical track you don't like. Opposing crew members may get involved in jesting you while you battle their

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<sup>4</sup> Breaking battles are a performance. Opponents may perform gestures illustrating disdain for each other in ways that are not an expression of their taste, but instead are elements of sportsmanship meant to throw each other off their 'game' or best performance.

friend and that can lead to politics too. Knowing all of this from my experience as a b-girl, I was reluctant to get too invested. Luckily I lost my next battle.

The day after the battle, I brought my friend to practice and for the first time, all of the b-boys made eye contact with me, gave me 'respect' and talked to me more. It was then I realised that I, whilst hanging in the background at practices, was not situated as an active participant of the scene. It wasn't until I performed at an event that they saw me in my 'role' as a b-girl in the scene, making an important moment<sup>5</sup>.

Even though I was based out of Edinburgh, I quickly began to venture over to Glasgow to check out the local scene there. I had contacted a b-boy from a crew on MySpace, having searched for 'Scotland b-boy,' etc. and he offered to pick me up at the train station and bring me to their practice spot. This generous offer proved to be only the beginning of a series of car rides, practices, events, and parties hosted by their crew. I immediately felt at home in their local space. They rehearsed at a warehouse shared with artists, jugglers and that special breed of artists known as 'graffiti writers' who had also painted their area of the spot. At the time, there were also two b-boys visiting from Poland who were training hard. The practices were quite sociable, unlike the Edinburgh practices where each b-boy found a space of the room and just trained on the spot, these dancers tended to form a circle (loosely on the

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<sup>5</sup> I am thankful to the b-boy who encouraged me to battle, by telling me they 'needed' another person to even things out (they didn't; the number was still uneven and another out of practice b-boy volunteered to battle after mine). Also, his reference to the value of my 'foundation footwork' on the microphone was a pedagogical articulation for the younger b-boys there that may have meant something too.

linoleum set up) and take turns dancing, watching each other and providing feedback.

I met an ‘old school’<sup>6</sup> b-girl and DJ from the same crew who also took me under her wing, describing the past of the local scene, offering to show me videos and introduce me to people. Just to backtrack for a moment, when I first saw her, it was at an event happening just outside of Glasgow. When I walked in to the event, and danced, I looked intimidating to some of the dancers. (I do have a certain walk and look when I’m in the b-girl zone) So, although I had smiled at her and the other b-girl as they walked by me, they didn’t notice because they were averting their eyes. Months later, during a car ride, she reminisced about how scary I had seemed to her and how she couldn’t believe how quiet I was in person. I began to think about how I could become more conscious of and change my style and presence, so as to not intimidate, or offend. In other words, performing a researcher role felt like it required the opposite of what performing as a b-girl did!

I also decided to start taking dance classes and workshops wherever possible, as this proved to be one of the easiest ways in which to access people’s knowledge, aesthetics, musical choices and approaches to the dance. This also proved to be a revealing method as I quickly discovered that most of the ‘spectators’ at the local b-boy battles, held at *Dance Base* and other venues, were all practicing dancers themselves who took classes! I wouldn’t have realised that if I had only attended local practices, but actually most of the people

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Old school’ can be used as both a positive and derogative term. This can relate to the age of a participant, when they began dancing or a particular style of dance that seems dated now.



watching at the events had tried to break at some point or were currently practicing at the time in the classroom environment, having never ventured out to the local practices.

During this time in Edinburgh, I decided to use the approach of 'snowball sampling' to include specific, well-known b-boys or b-girls from other countries, I followed leads that Scottish b-boys and b-girls mentioned. The younger generation of b-boys, in their early 20s, who frequented the clubs were quick to mention that all their favorite b-boys were from South Korea, although one b-boy was heavily influenced by Karl "Dyze" Alba of the Canadian crew, Supernaturalz. The local b-boys who were my age referenced Storm and Alien Ness, two well-known dancers both residing in Europe at the time, as being influential figures in their development, among others including American b-boy, Reveal of Rockforce Crew. During my time in Edinburgh, all of the above dancers, besides Storm<sup>7</sup>, visited Edinburgh to give master class workshops.

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<sup>7</sup> Storm was invited to Glasgow in 2010 to give workshops for the local crew.

## Appendix B

### Ethnographic field notes: Berlin, Germany 2008

In this section, I want to return to issues of the actual work of dance, beyond the building of an international career. No one has ever built an international career from doing street shows (also known as ‘hitting’ in various cities) yet this is one area where many b-boys and b-girls have not only earned some income, but also honed their skills through daily performances. In fact, many of the participants I spoke with considered these local, hourly performances more as training than any sort of meaningful ‘performance.’

Breaking that happens on the street is often treated with a particular gloss, as a reclaiming of the street by youth (regardless of dancers’ actual ages!) However, the underlying goals of these performances involve making money and training at dance. This is also one area that demonstrates clearly how expansive the migratory tendencies of international networks are within breaking culture. One example from my research in Berlin will illustrate this further.

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 I watched street show performances in Berlin that I was invited, by a b-boy participant, to videotape and think about for my research project. The show took place behind the bombed out church at Zoologischer Garten (the *Gedächtniskirche*). There were groups of students getting a tour of the area, a water fountain with people gathered around it on

benches, and trees slotted into the concrete which provided shelter for concrete benches throughout the park. I was invited to come and watch the performances the previous evening, at a b-boy practice at a community centre (Haus der Jugend), by a Polish b-boy in his mid 20s.

This Polish b-boy had previously been living in Glasgow. He was one of two Polish b-boys in Glasgow who were training with the Flyin' Jalapenos Crew. (At that time there was one Polish b-boy living in Edinburgh<sup>1</sup> and about half of the b-boy scene in Dublin, Ireland consisted of Polish immigrants.)

On this day in Berlin, Rafael was performing with an average of six other dancers, including one other dancer from Poland who now lives in Berlin, to make money. Rafael would be going back to school in Poland in September for two weeks (and so he would miss many events and opportunities, he explained to me). There was a skateboarder doing tricks, who brought the special ghetto blaster he'd made. The ghetto blaster is huge; the outsides are made of wood, and it's on wheels.

A b-boy, originally from Croatia, introduced the show, telling spectators to gather closer around the chalked area of the cement, to clap for what they like (and for what they don't like) and to give money. He identified these as 'the rules' of the performance. He quipped to the audience that they are dancing for the love ... of money. The rest of the dancers were from Berlin, except for a Scottish b-girl who performed as their special guest while she was travelling in

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<sup>1</sup> Just as a side note. About half of the b-boys I met in Dublin were Polish immigrants. The Polish b-boys have told me that I need to see the scene in Poland because it is hugely popular right now. I have been hearing about the level of the up and coming b-girls there for some time now.

Germany. She had come there for *We B-girlz*, an all-female international festival that lasted throughout the month of August, and she competed with the local crew, Tatsumaki San<sup>2</sup> and I.

The b-boys did about four shows this day. It was cloudy, and they said the money wasn't very good at this time of year because the crowds have died down. Sometimes they performed routines; mostly they performed spectacular moves as solos. The music they played included: *I Believe In Miracles* (Jackson Sisters), *Don't Sweat the Technique* (Eric B and Rakim), *Dance to the drummer's beat* (Herman Kelly & Life), sections from DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing* album, *Made You Look* (Nas), an instrumental remix of *Killin' in the Name Of* (Rage against the machine), *Puerto Rico* (Frankie Cutlass), and *What You Don't Know Won't Hurt You* (El Chicano).

Each of the dancers was introduced as a famous celebrity including: SpongeBob, Brad Pitt, Britney Spears, Bruce Lee, etc. The show was organised for the entertainment of the spectator who does not dance, and in doing so this is clearly distinct from local and regional breaking events popular with b-boys/b-girls. Breaking events are designed for the pleasures of participating in dance rather than for spectatorship. The street shows are designed for two purposes: to entertain the crowd of spectators and to make money, and then for a third reason also: to train at the work of the dance (for the b-boys and b-girls).

When I asked one of the dancers where he was from he said Berlin, and

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<sup>2</sup> This b-girl crew consisted of a b-girl from Japan who lives in Berlin, a b-girl from East Berlin, one from the West, one from Greece, one from Potsdam – just outside of Berlin, and a beginner b-girl with a gymnastic background from Switzerland who was working for the festival.

pointed out who else was from Berlin. I asked, “East or West?” He said, “huh? East or West?” And he started laughing, “it doesn’t matter...West”, he replied. People were taking pictures or videotaping the performance, and some were giving money. The b-boys showed up at different times and the money was divided after each ‘show’, which began when the b-boy introduced that the show was starting, and ended when they took a bow. Between performances, they often danced, practiced or gave each other advice on moves. Some grabbed “wasser” or a Red Bull. The crowd began to gather as they practiced and danced, and often was especially interested or intrigued when it was announced that the show would begin (indicating that all the spectacular moves they had seen so far were just warm-ups for the show).

In Glasgow, a year earlier (2007) during a b-boy session in the park, the Polish b-boy had had some interesting perspectives to add about ageing. He explained that at his age now (early 20s) he already felt too old for the dance. He could feel that his body was becoming less limber and capable. Because he could already feel the ageing of his body in significant ways, he could recognise the difficulties that come with getting older in his dance practice. I would argue that dance practice makes one aware of the ageing process at a younger age than those who are not invested in a sort of performance reliant on physicality.

Musical Selections at Practices: More on Berlin...

The night before the Berlin street show, about half of these performing dancers were at one of the free training sessions happening at a community centre in the city. The first practice was from 3-7pm at KMA or Antenne, which

is located just outside the Hallesches Tor U-bahn stop, or as the Polish b-boy called it “the Turkish ghetto.” The second practice was at Haus der Jugend from 7-10. I have been to this particular, latter practice spot twice now; the first time was in June before the sessions stopped for the summer. On both occasions, one of the best b-boys in the room tends to choose the music, skipping tracks that they aren’t feeling much, and repeating songs.

On the occasion of September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Polish b-boy, Rafael, chooses the tunes. There are about forty people practicing. The youngest boys are around 7 years old, and the oldest is in his forties. There are five b-girls (including myself and my Scottish friend) and one female popper. In one corner of the room there are mats laid out for b-boys to practice moves on<sup>3</sup>.

Although the practice seems chaotic, dancers quickly negotiate their space on the floor, and there is an organic ebb and flow to the space’s transformations as various circles form and disperse as dancers move about, sometimes dancing for others, sometimes battling each other for fun, sometimes horsing around (mainly the younger dancers) and sometimes rehearsing the same move over and over in the same spot. There is also a stage that people sometimes dance on.

There are a lot of Turkish dancers at this spot, but it is also incredibly multicultural. An American ethnographer researching the Berlin hip hop scene, Inez Templeton, has previously argued that the Turkish hip hop heads felt that they were there ‘first’ at community centers before the scene was taken over by

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<sup>3</sup> When I was here for a practice in June, a woman who works at the centre came in to explain to the dancers only to use mats in the one corner of the room not on the stage because they were getting damaged.

other, often more privileged, participants.

There is a lot of overlap between the two practice spaces, although there were fewer dancers at KMA. KMA is a smaller space, so often everyone forms a large circle and takes turns in the centre, with people that have enough room on the side of the circle also practicing moves there. When a dancer is in the centre of the space they perform for others, and often everyone watches people on the sides as well. There are two mirrors off to the sides of the circle, and the poppers/new style dancers tend each to take a mirror and maintain their position there for the entire evening.

There are other free practices in Berlin including a Wednesday/Friday practice at CHIP on Reichenberger Straße. There is also an all b-girl class with an old school b-boy from the East at KMA on Mondays, and the Flying Steps crew has a dance academy where they teach classes during the week. Also, dancers find their own spots for their crews to practice. Some of the local b-girls practice at the Naunyritze (this was during the summer, so normally practices aren't on there, but one of the dancers had a key). Also sometimes dancers would take the U-bahn and then get picked up in cars at a small town right beside Potsdamer Platz where they could practice in a gymnasium with the b-boys out there.

There is more range in the music played at practices in Berlin, than in other practice spots in Montreal, Toronto, L.A., Edinburgh, Glasgow and Leeds. In Berlin, on various occasions, dancers played metal, techno, and strange assortments, including German rap, disco, and R&B. Also, one CD tended to be played over and over again (on repeat) over the duration of a practice session

(3-4 hours).

If b-boys or b-girls visit from other countries they are more likely to be invited to practices and hang out sessions if they have a high skill of dancing, an international reputation, or have a mutual acquaintance with the dancers here. New arrivals are often invited to participate in a sort of 'who you know' game with the outcome proving allegiances based on shared acquaintances or at least knowledge of the key players in the scene. The purpose is actually to find out who they are affiliated with and have alliances with, and this is a source of both extended belonging and sometimes further tensions.





## Appendix C

### Ethnographic field notes: *Hip Opsession* Festival, Nantes, France 2009

Ethnographic Field Notes from a Day of *Hip Opsession 5*:

#### An International Breaking Battle

*Hip Opsession 5* took place in Nantes, France between February 12 and 28<sup>th</sup> 2009. The headliners for this hip hop festival include EPMD, Medine, Bustaflex, Insight, Foreign Beggars, Oriental Impact, Supernaturalz, M.A.C Crew, DJ One Up, Wadi and “...” (i.e. many more, according to the flyer). Supernaturalz are the breaking crew that I followed in the summer of 2007 as part of my research, and they include the well-known b-boy from Toronto, Dyzee. The international b-boy battles take place on Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> so most of the crews show up on Feb. 13<sup>th</sup> and leave by Sunday Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>. It’s a short stay for them in Nantes and they don’t attend the rest of the festival. As one b-boy points out, he doesn’t like events such as this one because they are designed for families and spectators rather for than b-boys.

In this section, I describe the lead up to the battle, from the night before to the day of the b-boy event. In doing so, I would like to compare this with an observation that I made at the German national finals for BOTY (Battle of the Year) in 2008, when I was allowed special access to observe the tech support preparations and the breaking crews doing dress rehearsals before the national finals. I noticed that there were many people involved in constructing the event

who would not be considered part of the culture, yet who contribute to its happening nevertheless. In this account, sound guys, lighting technicians, door staff (sometimes bouncers), graphic designers, etc. all contribute to creating the event that the b-boys enjoy.

During the morning sound check for *Hip Opssession 5* (that ends up running all day until the qualifiers begin at 2 p.m.) a man supervising the activities smokes a cigarette in the hall. There are bleachers set up and proper theatrical seating for the audience. Fusik, the funk band from Miami that will be playing at the event live, arrived at 11 a.m. on the day of the event to begin their sound check.

On my way to meet up with the drummer at *Le Lieu Unique*, where the events will take place, I pass the IBIS hotel where most of the b-boys and DJs are staying. It's just down the street from the event. There is an ominous silence in the air. I see a pair of b-boys across the street jogging by in deep conversation, b-boys with backpacks wandering over the bridge, and b-boys loitering outside the hotel lobby. Under the bridge there are freshly painted graffiti pieces, including a shout out to the "Mighty Zulu Kingz." The pieces were all painted the day before in broad daylight (so I'm assuming it's a legal wall).

Inside the Lieu Unique there are a few groups of people, not b-boys or b-girls, in the lobby having coffee. Inside the main event area the musicians are warming up. The drummer and percussionist from Fusik are playing together and the guitar player is to their right, chatting with the bass player while playing some individual notes on his instrument. There are five monitors surrounding the musicians and they are raised up on the fifth of five long bleachers to the

front of the space. The drummers are doing a call and response with each other and the guitar is wailing over top. Three men are putting up a sponsorship banner by the bleachers where the bleed over audience will stand (behind the chairs of the judges); two men are flipping through a stapled pile of pages that seem to have a list of things to do on them; a couple of women are wandering around the space without any specific tasks. There is a huge banner for the event already positioned above where the band is, and eventually some of the men begin setting up the DJ equipment on the highest bleacher, just above where the funk band will play.

I walk back out into the lobby and a patron with a dog walks by me. The pre-party for the event took place here the night before, where b-boys had been stretching behind an encasement that became their “backstage” area. The morning light reveals that this is the “librarie” where postcards and art books are sold. This event is taking place at a cultural arts center. Eventually, a woman comes to set up inside the caged area, working the cash register, but it’s not open for business yet.

At 12:30 a.m. lots of families begin arriving and there are a few tables full of girls in the lobby. A crew of b-boys that will later this afternoon enter the qualifiers set up shop at one of the tables by the door. The international event is structured as a 3 on 3 crew battle. Most of the international crews have been invited to compete, and already have their places set for the evening event. This gets started at 7 p.m. There is also a 1 on 1 competition that will take place, between crew battles, and all of the dancers in this competition have been invited and paid to participate. However, the organisers have set it up so that

there are three extra spots open in the crew battle (for three additional crews) so local crews, and crews that want to participate, can come and compete for the spots during the qualifiers that happen in the afternoon. It's a way for lesser-known crews to get practice, possibly make a name for themselves and participate in the event.

I let Sanchez, one of the members of the funk band Fusik, know that I am waiting here for an interview with Felix when they are done sound check. But I also gesture to him that I'm not in a hurry. I've got a book in front of me, as well as a journal, a mini tape recorder, and a coffee from the bar. Last night, I stayed until the end of the pre-party with my host, Dr. Isabelle Kauffmann, who has written about hip hop dance in France. After the pre-party ended, we went back to the IBIS hotel eventually – after much confusion and chit chat on the street outside of the party - for more conversations with dancers and with DJ Renegade. Renegade calls out to one of the b-boys from across the lobby, “shouldn't you be sleeping?” and the b-boy sheepishly responds that, “(He) won't miss the event again, like last time...” For the dancers, who are only here for a very short time, it is a chance to meet up with old friends from other places and make new connections with b-boys from around the world.

Now, on the day of the event, Felix comes over to say he likes this space and how people value the dance here in France. I agree that it gives the dance a different cultural context. He points out that in Miami people might think it's cool and let the b-boys dance for maybe 15 minutes at a club, but then they've seen enough, whereas here they were even breaking at the end of the night at the party and the people were still encouraging them to keep going. (This event

in Nantes does only happen once a year, for a couple of weeks, and then they don't see much in the way of hip-hop for another year. The pre-party is part of the event, so this is also a special context within which to consider the reception of audiences.) Felix mentions that the sound check is getting a late start and that he'll be back. I insist that there's no hurry and that I'm quite content to sit at a table and just look around and read and write. I text Isabelle to let her know that I will likely end up staying for the whole day. Then I start to look around.

Two young women with Red Bull jackets and blue jeans are peering in the windows of the doors into the main event area. One has a Red Bull hat on as well. They wander out of sight. As I wait for things to happen, I review notes from my conversation with Renegade at the pre-party last night. Based on his knowledge so far about my personal tastes, he mentions that I would probably be interested to see the Dutch dancers and those from the Ukraine that will be competing today. It's been the same top crews internationally for the last 10 years or so (from South Korea, Japan, Russia, France) but the Dutch and Ukrainian crews have "young blood" and new b-boys on the scene. Renegade describes how the Dutch b-boys take lots of risks and are original, for example, the Hustle Kidz<sup>1</sup>. They try moves that, if they fall out of them, are hard to recover from. He says, "you notice when they miss but they are so refreshing and original."

A man in his thirties and a woman in her twenties roll past me on the ramp a ton of water bottles, on a cart that they push through the doors into the

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<sup>1</sup> See a documentary about Hustle Kidz here:

<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYN-2XBcH88&feature=player\\_embedded#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYN-2XBcH88&feature=player_embedded#!)>

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event. B-boys inside the doors look tired, maybe even cranky and a bit bored. A few of the younger ones look disdainfully at the non-dancers enjoying their morning in the art lobby. I haven't seen the Finnish dancers around yet today but Flo Mo were definitely representing at the pre-party as the night progressed. Renegade had commented last night that I've seen more international events than most b-boys who only get to see one or two. I say it's true, and wonder how Flo Mo can manage all of this. I've seen them everywhere lately: in the U.K. for workshops, recent footage from South Korea and the U.S. and now last night in France. Renegade mentioned that it's really stressful with all the traveling he does, and that it's hard to keep a healthy lifestyle when on the road so much.

Now, b-boys with matching red sweatshirts walk into the lobby, their b-boy names on the lower part of the back of their shirts. I think about the story that I'm waiting for. Renegade says that he heard Fusik, the funk band, on myspace and downloaded their tracks. When he was DJing at an international event in Korea, he played their song and people have been asking him what the name of the track was since then. That's part of the reason I want to talk to Felix. I'm interested in the *new* music that gets introduced to breaking culture. The other part I'm curious about is a live band being booked for an international breaking gig. That's exciting in many ways. At an event I went to recently in Newcastle, hosted by members of Bad Taste Cru (a group of mainly Irish b-boys who ended up England and are one of the best crews in the country), there were drummers and percussionists present at the pre-party and the day of the event as well, and the flyer for the event featured a b-boy in front of a drum kit being

played by a drummer in a backyard.

I look at some of the b-boys walking by. They focus their eyes on the wall and don't make eye contact. I am an outsider (dressed in glasses, knit sweater, pinstriped pants and dress shoes). Later, b-girl A.T. and I will have a laugh when I wave to her and it takes her a moment to recognise me because of my non-b-girl outfit. These b-boys are in their world and it's a world that doesn't recognise anyone on the outside that they don't know. They are possibly the future stars of the scene, and need a lot of psychological build up to take on the qualifiers. The qualifiers run from 2 until 5 p.m. The group of b-boys sitting at a table by the door is looking anxious. I can read the front of their shirts and the name of their crew, and I notice that their name isn't on the flyer.

At 1pm the caged in store at the center of the lobby opens and the woman working there puts the postcard racks outside the store. I take a trip downstairs to the washrooms. In the downstairs area of the building there are graffiti tags covering the entire washroom, including names all over the mirrors. When I return to my table, the programmes for the festival have been replenished with a fresh new stack. More b-boys are entering the lobby and shake hands, b-boy style. I see the first girl that resembles a dancer make her appearance with a group of guys. The four b-boys at the table by the door are looking bored. One has a camera casually out, poised and ready, and the others read the programme for the festival. More spectator families have arrived, and what appear to be more b-girls although their style isn't quite convincing. They have traces of a 'beginner' in their fashion sense, with matching tracksuit jackets and Adidas shell toes. Now, some b-girls enter including b-girl Valentine from



France. They look serious; have backpacks filled with necessary supplies to make it through the day (changes of outfits for when they get sweaty, water bottles, change of shoes, snacks, etc).

B-boys dressed in matching green outfits with matching red hats have just shown up. A b-boy/DJ/MC whistles a tune as he walks passed me, wheeling his luggage behind him with a stack of CDs in his hands. He gives the b-boys in green handshakes and turns around to walk with them in the opposite direction to where he was headed initially.

The noise volume of the lobby has amplified. None of the b-boys have stepped inside the gift shop/book store yet. The b-boys and b-girls entering the building look like the artists of now. They are fashion conscious, have their own codes and conventions, look at home in this space but disdainful of the commercial elements that don't fit their customs (Red Bull is ok, art books aren't) and they could be mistaken for art school kids, except that they need to wear loose fitting clothes and sneakers for dancing. At 1.20 pm. Renegade walks past and says he was up until 7 a.m. last night talking to the b-boys, especially about Dyzee's new judging system. I ask if he's had coffee yet and he says he doesn't drink coffee, then pauses before joking that he's not drinking coffee because he's not 'North American.' He points out crews to watch out for on the flyer including Hustle Kidz, Rugged Solutions and Just Do It, a b-boy whom he calls the "Clark Kent" of the b-boy world. He lives on a farm in Holland and has incredible power moves.

Felix walks by again to chat and apologise that the sound check is running late. He mentions that his funk band played at the Evolution event in

Spain and at the finals for the event that was held in Florida. He rushes off again. By early afternoon, I see my first b-boy toprock in the hallway, from a member of a group of b-boys that have taken over a staircase near the main entrance to the event, that will not be used as an entrance today. The b-boys in green, in chairs by the door, are also doing some chair dancing; arm movements, like rocking styles, in their seats.

Three young boys (two with pairs of glasses on) all wearing sneakers entered the lobby a while ago with an adult and are now sitting at a table where the first group of b-boys that arrived used to be. They are eating store-bought sandwiches in brown paper bags that they brought in from outside. They are looking about at the spectacle of the b-boys around them half of the time, although their interest is mainly fixated on the sandwiches directly in front of them. Many more spectators and styled out dancers are wandering through the lobby and I can hear the muffled sounds from the continuing sound check through the doors to the main foyer. A new guy with a long ponytail and a Carlsberg shirt is working the bar. Another cart full of more water bottles and undisclosed items in boxes (later to be revealed as graffiti art books, t-shirts, etc) are wheeled passed me towards an entrance to the main area that is now locked. The guy behind the bar seems to be doubling as a waiter and pauses as the cart goes by.

The door is opened from the inside of the main event and a b-boy tries to rush in to the event before the cart, but is stopped by the employees pushing the cart. He laughs and some of the b-boys in green from the other side of the room and a different b-boy camp laugh too and say some words to demonstrate their

approval of the action. Being a punk is a sign of being part of the group and culture. The b-boys “in green” aren’t just wearing green; they have green bandannas, green jackets, green backpacks and green and white shoes. They are clearly marked out as a crew together. Spectators, mainly in jeans and many wearing brown leather jackets or calf high leather boots (the women) are continuing to stroll in with sandwiches.

Soon all the b-boys in both main camps leave the main lobby area and pile up by the would-be entrance. I make a note about how this is the year of burgundy for amateur b-boys and wonder who started that trend. About 5 minutes later the b-boys in green wander back into the main part of the lobby, dragging their feet, and separate into two groups waiting in different parts of the foyer – one at a table by me, and the others where another crew of b-boys had been hanging out by the stairs. Within 2 minutes they are all back together and hanging out by the table. The rack returns down the ramp and the pusher is wiping his brow of sweat again. This time his pushcart has a lone water kettle on it.

Now the predominantly concrete space is filled with the sounds of drinking glasses clinking at the bar. There is a restaurant at the far end of the establishment with specials for Valentine’s Day listed outside the cornered off area. A b-boy in sunglasses arrives looking slightly more hip than his counter parts so far filling the space. Meanwhile, the little boys have finished their sandwiches and have moved on to drinks in glasses with straws bought here in the lobby. Two even littler ones, a boy and a girl, race past me and are called by their caregiver to move and wait by the entrance. The little boys are laughing in

their seats and drinking from their straws without using their hands. They look entertained; meanwhile the b-boys around them look impatient, waiting for the event to start. Some of the better known b-boys begin to arrive and say hello to everyone. By this time, I see the first b-boy drinking Red Bull in the lobby. More of the spectators are in the shop now.

It's ten minutes to 3 p.m. and the line-up that begins out of my sight and around the corner has grown to the point where it stretches out into the main lobby and almost to the bar. Many more people enter with sandwiches, and the age range is expansive for spectators. Many are in their thirties and forties (and the *Break Hit* documentary at a movie theatre a few nights later will have a crowd of mainly over thirty year olds to learn about hip-hop).

Moving inside the main room of the event now, there are t-shirts for sale, DJ One-Up CDs for 5 euros and the graf book is "les Murs de l'atlantique" for 20 euros. A small Heineken is 2, 5 and a pint is 4 euros. There is also Coca Cola for 1 euro and orange juice for the same price. There are three video screens in the space and one is above the commodities for sale. At this point the crowd is in the shot, which looks out towards empty bleachers rather than featuring the DJs. B-boys spread out all over the side space to warm up. No one is dancing in circles. There is a lot of individual practice going on, but none of the dancers seem to be paying attention to each other as they dance. The surface near the main floor of the event, that was covered with a metallic covering before, now has black flooring laid over the top. Spectators are gathered on the floor all around the circle, cross-legged and packed in. Many others have taken their seats in the rows of built in bleachers that pile up towards the sound booth at

the top back of the space.

The emcee, or “speaker” as they say here, is calling for participants to come where he needs them “Where you at?” This emcee, named Nasty, is an old school pioneer and he wears a “Quality Street” shirt which helps me recognise him from the party last night, where he wore a shirt (same one?) with the same logo. The DJs are already playing some classic breaks. There are four DJs listed for the qualifiers and evening event, and these DJs playing the qualifier party are playing some hype tracks before the event has even begun really. The second emcee of the night I recognise from the Circle Kingz jam in Switzerland, where he’s from.

They struggle over the name of the first crew called up to battle: “White team? Wheat team?” they say on the mic. Then they “give it up” for the jury: Cros1 (from the States), Nacera (b-girl from France), and Born (from Korea). They say “Straight from Korea” in English. The emcees introduce each other. They announce that the contest is 3 on 3 battle and 3 crews will qualify for tonight. One emcee comments on a dancer’s outfit “with the orange combo” – it’s a slight judgment. Nasty, the other emcee, stands beside the crew as they battle. Cros1 is wearing a blue Armory Shirt and each of the judges makes a long, serious face, barely breaking into a smile for the entire event. It’s a fully mediated landscape. Two video screens are in this main area and the camera crew takes up the space closest to the competitors.

When breaking crews show recognition for each other and shake hands before they battle they are reprimanded by the emcees. The second time it happens in a battle the dancers are discouraged from this behavior, “no love it’s

battle time” the emcee says. Another dancer gets a better introduction by the emcee who says, “uh oh – I know him!” then “oh shit!” as he’s dancing and “game over” when he’s finished dancing. A b-boy missing a large part of his leg, with crutches, kills his round and becomes an instant crowd favorite. One of the emcees is lying on the ground with his mic to his mouth, making comments like “yeah” as the battles take place. The other emcee sometimes is standing between members of a crew while they are battling which is very strange. The audience is incredibly engaged and eager to clap and show appreciation or to participate through cheering.

Three young b-boys who battle each get a hug after their battle from what appears to be their ‘coach’, an older b-boy. There is one all b-girl crew, one crew with two b-girls and a b-boy, and one crew with two b-boys and a b-girl. When it’s the b-girls vs. the b-boys, one of the b-boys doing moves knocks into the judges hitting at least two of them and they look furious. The b-girls will later dance at the main event and they include Valentine, one of the best b-girls internationally at the moment (strange that she is in qualifiers actually and not an invited guest).

While the event is going on there is a Vice magazine art show happening upstairs, and a piano in the far corner of the lobby area is being played. On the way out of the event, past the IBIS hotel, there is a music shop called “Musique 18”, and a long, narrow parking lot across from train tracks. Isabelle lives above the Café Creperie, *Le Saxo* with a fluorescent, lit up yellow sax in the window. I take a moment to gather my thoughts before returning for the main evening event. It’s been a long day and it’s just beginning.

At the pre-party, the night before when we arrived after 11 pm, we weren't asked for ID at the door. A group of b-boys were in a corner next to the bar, performing for spectators. They looked to me like locals or amateurs. A circle was at the back of the room and there was also a 'dance floor' with 'regular' people dancing. Isabelle and I peruse the circles and decide to dance with the regulars. I run into a b-boy I battled at *Circle Kingz*, an event in Switzerland that happened not too long ago. He recognises me and says hello. I dance socially and occasionally venture over to the circles to see what is going on and which dancers have arrived.

A good track comes on and the Brazilian b-boys who were dancing with girls near us make a circle and start dancing. A drunken male spectator pushes me into the circle (this is typical of both female and male spectators in proximity to a female dancer – in my research I was also physically shoved into a circle by a Glaswegian woman who wanted to see a female dance!). I do some toprock and footwork but don't venture a freeze even. A guy, later to be known as Felix, comes over to give me a handshake of approval. He was dancing for a while too, a little self-consciously, as people do when they are in unknown terrain without their crew and perhaps not at the level of say the Tsunami All-Stars, the Brazilian b-boys who will be competing the next day. They are all love and respect. Felix is the drummer for the funk band in Miami, Florida although he mentions having family in Toronto. He mentions that he is learning to play stand up bass as well.

He and another member of his band were b-boys first and sometimes when they are playing they will switch off so one of them can dance. They

always try to make music that people can dance to (and not just b-boys – all sorts of music and many styles). We set up an interview for after the sound check. He says, sometimes when someone dances he can tell that they play an instrument, or guesses because of how they play with the music. I talk to him a bit more and then offer to get Isabelle and him a drink. Then I wander around and see that Flo Mo have arrived. Hat Solo and A.T. are mining the circle at the back (after a while I notice that the UK b-boy with the burgundy vest has arrived – at least I think he's from the UK. I've seen him in the UK, Switzerland and now France at jams). I see Savio, Dyzee and Bridges from Supernaturalz in the circle and Savio waves me over. Hat Solo calls out Bridges by entering the circle right after him and directing his energy towards him so the two of them go at least three more rounds each in the cypher.

I wander off. Then I dance for a large part of the night socially, but notice at some point that the lockers and poppers have shown up (they had a competition earlier that day) and that they are now working the three main circle areas of the event and adding one more in the corner that seems to be mainly older dancers. Isabelle introduces me to them later on in the evening as some of the pioneers in France including Fox (who first met DJ Renegade in 1993 at a Belgium battle)...

That's the pre-party. Back to the event today. It's 2:30 p.m. and most of the participants have piled on to the street or outside the venue to socialise. Spectators enjoy a beer at the bar, a couple plays at the piano together and a little boy with his caregiver looks on with wonder for a bit before being picked up and carried off. Some b-girls stay inside to socialise including the b-girl judge.



Still photos and flyers for upcoming events fade in and out of each other on the video screen in the lobby on repeat. The bass is pounding through the wall from the main room to the point of irritation. Artists with canvas bats move occasionally in and out of the building. It's tamed down a bit after a while. There is hardly a trace of any b-boys in the place; and the b-girls have all left. Just one or two handshakes that look remotely hip hop take place in the space for a bit as the dancers find places to eat and socialise elsewhere.

Inside the main room, Kauffmann's friend is in the corner of the video screen doing sign language to navigate what the emcees are saying. All of the spectators are seated or crowded around the main stage area (which is on the floor) and the b-boys are getting hyped in practice circles in the large space beside the main event. Grazy does some complete sets next to b-boys in the corner that are rehearsing a tandem routine. One of the emcees from the day event picks a circle with a spotlight and does some toprock. A bigger guy from Flexible Flaw in the corner is killing some rocking and original footwork flavor.

Closer to me my, battle opponents from Circle Kingz are practicing (they no longer recognise me as they did at the pre-party because I am in work attire). Younger boys with tons of energy and really speedy (maybe too quick?) toprock and footwork hit every beat and accent in the music. A little guy with dreads and a black outfit manages to hit every possible sound of the music with a body accent. As he gets older, I imagine he will start picking the beats and accents in the music that he wants to emphasise rather than being indiscriminate. Grazy is dancing in front of me and listening to the music and slowly getting into his groove. Beside him a b-boy is wearing a Circle Kingz t-shirt and getting his

power combinations warmed up.

Ata is wearing bright green trousers<sup>2</sup> and doing original toprock moves where he is clearly playing with the concept of keeping one leg completely straight the whole time (unless of course he's injured!). A.T. from Flo Mo is cruising around and hasn't picked a spot yet in which to settle down and get warmed up. A guy with grey trousers warms up with some toprock. He's nervous, so tentatively dancing and not really hitting the beats properly, but I get a sense that if he was relaxed he would probably be a good dancer. A b-boy massages his hip to get it warmed up and does a side kick out stretch (the one that gets you ready to whip your leg for a windmill or flare).

I run into Felix for an interview on the fly. He explains that he got into the music from b-boying and already knew what to do when he was learning the drums. He thinks that any art form that you get into opens up or acts as a gateway to all other art forms. He was already dancing, so to learn the drums he would just think: I gotta go like this and like that, I already know what to do. Instead of putting my arms there like in toprock, I hit that.

Felix grew up going to "PAL" which stands for the police athletic league which was a community center and meeting ground in South Florida where Speedy Legs of Skill Methodz would teach. Speedy Legs was Cuban and would bring drums (but not play them). At Pro-Am, an event that has happened in Miami for years, one year there was a drummer and percussionist playing live. Felix had heard break beats before, but had never heard the sounds live. As soon as he heard the live snare drum hit and the quality of the sound he was hooked.

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<sup>2</sup> In Canada, I would say 'pants,' however in the UK that means underwear.

He said he was gonna start learning the drums and that was 2000 or maybe 2001, and now nine years later he's performing at jams all over the world. His b-boy crew is called Unique Styles Crew and they are still repping. He talked to me a bit more about how exciting it is to dance to music he's created himself with his band.

By this time, Flo Mo are warming up near the door. Members of the Supernaturalz crew and Flexible Flav are hanging out on the other side of the door, almost in the dark, looking really focused but relaxed. The battles have begun. There are video cameras everywhere, the crowd claps along and its standing room only. I watch a b-boy battle with Supernaturalz that they win. At the end of the battle the emcee yells "est-ce que tu aimee?" to the audience, and they cheer for the Toronto dancers. Ata is dancing with the Hustle Kidz and they clap for their opponents during battles and look like they are on a 'next level' tip with their dancing (I think they are too). Ata's green trousers look blue on the video screens. The sign language for the crowd cheering is a hip hop gesture, the same type crowds would do at a rap show. There are also shots on the screen of Renegade scratching in breaks at the beginning of battles.

When crews lose their battles they return to the side cyphers with a ton of energy, and dance hard to reorganize their egos and remind themselves that they are indeed good dancers. At 18.30h I watch Flexible Flav from the U.S. win a battle. It strikes me after talking to Felix about the distinction of battles here and in the U.S. that b-boying is likely to have the same history as film and film studies. Film was considered to be lowbrow and an artform of the lower classes in the United States, not taken seriously as an art. But the French began to take

B films of the USA seriously (the emergence of film noir) and study them. Then the Americans eventually began to see their own films (the lowly ones) as art through the eyes of the French writers. It's the spectatorship of the French that is interesting. They have put the dance into a cultural context, and look at the dancing as art, acknowledging both the spectacular qualities of the dance and the subtle nuances of footwork and conceptual movements. Their reception, general spectatorship and support structures are advanced: they see the art of the dance.

Tsunami All Stars from Brazil are battling Rugged Solutions from Holland and the DJ puts on a song with Brazilian vocals and then the 'evolution' song. When Vagabond Cru from France battle Flo Mo, "Cramp Your Style" comes on and the lyrics are interspersed between the break beats: "baby, sometimes you treat me good, sometimes you treat me bad, sometimes you make me happy, sometimes you make me sad – you do me wrong babe, you treat me like a child ..." When Flo Mo win the crowd boos and a Vagabond b-boy calls out the judges. One of the judges, b-boy Born from Korea (who hasn't warmed up and has been watching breaking battles and judging for hours) jumps up and serves the member of Vagabonds by hitting the beats better and with more style. The crowd cheers for him. In front of the video screen, in the side space, the Zulu Kingz count to four in English and practice their choreographed routine.

When the battles are over, Fusik covers songs like "Vitamin C" by Can. The b-boys and b-girls rep for a few more hours before the event slowly shuts down and people make their way out onto the street to make further plans. There is an after-party somewhere. I run into one of the members of Flexible

Flav, Morris, on the far side of the hotel. He is limping as he walks. I ask if he's ok and he explains that he injured himself messing around after the battles. He's from Sacramento, California but spends a fair bit of time in Toronto training with Dyzee.

## **Appendix D**

### **Britcore Rap**

Rap histories rarely discuss Britcore rap (also known as hip hop made in the U.K.). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a few albums, singles and the scene that backed these releases came to be known as 'Britcore.' The recordings emerged when Derek B, a more popular, mainstream and commercial act, signed Hijack to his label. The members of Hijack included Kimanchi Sly and DJ Supreme. Derek B was a DJ first and started his own radio station, WBLS. His rap break was on an American compilation that needed another track, so he did "Rock the Beat" (1986) under a pseudonym, and also did DJing under his own name. He first noticed Kimanchi Sly at a rap contest. As the story goes, DJ Supreme wanted to enter the competition but because he was a DJ whose specialty was scratching he couldn't represent their crew, at that time called the Turntable Trixters. The group was mainly a DJ scratch and DJ Supreme became notorious for advancing scratch techniques internationally. The UK hip hop scene's contribution to scratching is one of its most significant, and understudied achievements.

Sly entered the competition, after having some words with their nemesis crew before the battle began. DJ Supreme and himself had already agreed that they wouldn't claim any prize. When he was announced as the winner, he came out on the stage and threw the money into the crowd saying, "Money ain't the

matter, it's the principle. That makes us invincible." It was this act that caught the attention of Derek B. When Sly went to sign the recording contract he took the liberty himself of changing the name of the crew to Hijack. When he told the other members afterwards, they agreed to the new name.

*Stylewars* was a single released by Hijack in 1988. They released two singles and an album. It was produced and mixed by Simon Harris, although DJ Supreme recently said in a documentary that Harris didn't really produce the album. The sample used in *Stylewars* was "Blow Your Head" by Fred Wesley and the JB's. Public Enemy had originally sampled it, so it was considered a bite.

One of the advantages many of the productions of the Britcore scene had over their American counterparts was that their releases were "underground" and the samples didn't have to be cleared. The Britcore sound has come to be known as fast, with complicated scratch solos by the DJs, hard and aggressive tone of rap and imagery (following the lines of Public Enemy), theatrically gory on album covers and live performances and using many break beats. The music was popular in Europe and Japan. As one dancer from Germany explained to me, they weren't listening to American rap at this time in Berlin. They were listening and dancing to Britcore.

When *Stylewars* first came out, a Scottish DJ explained to me that he thought the album was American. Kimanchi Sly uses what sounds like an American accent (with reggae influences – common to the UK sounds at the time) and the album had a record sleeve. Most of the other albums produced in the U.K. had generic sleeves. Both of these factors had him assuming that the group was American. (At the time, Derek B also had a record sleeve). When the

listener heard the lyric “south London shocks” he had to readjust his perception to fully absorb that the group was from the U.K.

Another single by the group Hijack was “Hold No Hostage.” The back of the album includes an extensive note from El Shebazz Malcolm X about black people having their own dances and music made for black people, and that if people created this type of music then white people wouldn’t understand it. American DJ Qbert probably heard the release first on the Ice T track. Qbert and other American DJs who would later become well known as the best DJs in the world often cite Hijack and other Britcore groups with having advanced scratching techniques that they couldn’t figure out. Although Hijack was too violent in imagery and too hardcore in lyrics to break with the American audiences (I can’t stand this either as far as my musical tastes as a “Canadian” listener go), the scratching on the albums was eventually noticed by American turntablists and that is how the groups eventually got notoriety in the DJ community and culture of the States. In ‘Doomsday of Rap’, *Apache* by the Incredible Bongo Band is sampled. Many of the sounds, such as sirens, are borrowed from Public Enemy iconography.

Some of the other main artists associated with Britcore rap besides Hijack include Gunshot, Hardnoise, Blade and Son of Noise. They were named “Britcore” by fans in other countries. As mentioned earlier, they were influential to major b-boy crews in Europe in the 1990s. Some of them also performed alongside American b-boy crews such as Rocksteady, alongside Afrika Bambaataa and European crews such as Battle Squad. For example, Blade and



Son of Noise performed at 'Clean Jam' one of the most important hip hop events of the early 1990s.

## Appendix E

### Musical wastes & tastes: Experiencing music in urban dance practice

#### Abstract

In this article, I explore how recorded music can be experienced as wasted moments in a club setting. This involves a descriptive analysis of the ways that clubs nights are organized in terms of eclectic musical tastes, which are represented or expressed through dance performance. The discussion is based on a local ethnography of Edinburgh, Scotland involving DJs, b-boys and b-girls (“breakdancers”) and club patrons. Through this case study, I explore the implications of wasted music for ethnographic accounts of listening. I present the concept of musical waste as a framework for analysing the disjunctures between music and dance as commonly experienced by intermediaries and club goers.

**Keywords:** popular music; popular dance; hip hop culture; club culture; ethnography; intermediaries; breakdancing; breaking

#### An introduction to the imaginary listener

One way to address taste in music, which is rarely considered in the recent sociological literature about cultural practices and aesthetics, is to think about how it is informed by dance practice.<sup>1</sup> Dance is considered to be an ideal

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<sup>1</sup>For an overview of sociological approaches to the arts, specifically dance, and their

way of listening to music (Frith, 1996; Wittgenstein and Barrett,<sup>2</sup> 2007), as well as the embodiment of music (Chambers, 1985). I argue elsewhere that dance is a performance of musical tastes (Fogarty, 2010) and more specifically that urban dance performances tend to create, change, mediate and assemble musical experience. This connection, of music and dancer, is a vital way in which musical tastes are performed.

In this discussion, whose musical tastes are being performed also matters. Sometimes, in the situation of a club or party for example, the musical tastes being expressed through dance are actually imaginary; the DJ selects music that he imagines will suit the tastes of the dancers. Thus the taste and knowledge of the musical intermediary (i.e. the DJ) complicate the connection of music and dancer. This article will examine those obvious points of disjuncture between the musical tastes of dancers and the musical selection of DJs that can be described as musical wastes. This new term is, at least, a nice image of discard that sums up one way in which music is sometimes experienced in a club: as inappropriate and disappointing, rather than appropriate and enticing. It could be extended to those awkward moments of contempt at any type of gathering, from the wedding reception where the DJ is not catering to all the generations in attendance, to the dance competition where the DJ hired to play is not familiar with either the rhythms of the relevant dance style, or the energy demands on the dancers as the competition progresses towards the finals.

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discussion of themes such as 'tastes' and 'aesthetics' see Thomas (1995, pp. 1-30).

<sup>2</sup> As Wittgenstein (1980) writes in his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*: "If I could dance to the music, that would be the best way of expressing just *how* the refrain moves me" (Goehr, 2005, p. 321).

In this article, I will begin by developing a brief taxonomy of musical wastes that reveals many qualities of dancers' relationship to music, including elements that stretch beyond the recorded music itself into a network of social and spatial relationships involving performers, promoters, audience members and the situation and location of the clubs themselves. Through these images of waste, I will try to show new ways in which music can be a medium for the forging of social relationships (cf. DeNora, 2002). This will be followed by a review of some key concepts concerning musical taste that are useful to this discussion, alongside an overview of my approach to interviewing and observing participants who provided the insights on which the discussion is based. In what follows, an ethnographic approach to the intersection of a club scene with hip hop culture builds on the complexity of the themes of musical taste and listening. As I discuss not only the atmosphere of the club, but also various club nights' promotion and organization around musical tastes, I draw attention to the musical wastage involved. In the analysis sections that end this discussion, I relate these experiences of musical tastes to the listening practices of spectators and dancers.

### **Experiencing musical tastes**

There are two main approaches which set up the ethnographic analysis which follows, involving both sociological and philosophical accounts of taste. The first involves the interlinking of taste with ethnographic studies of locality and music scenes. The other involves issues arising from traditions of aesthetic analysis and the neglected accounts of an 'insider' dance perspective.

In recent years, a significant amount of, predominantly ethnographic, scholarship has been devoted to the relationship between music scenes and geographical locations, specifically urban spaces (for a good sample see: Cohen, 1991; Connell and Gibson, 2003; Toop, 2000; Watson, Hoyler and Mager, 2009). Scenes are organized around particular musical tastes which take the form of specific club nights, venues and activities.

When it comes to live music, dance is one way in which people show their appreciation for local bands in music communities (Finnegan, 1989). The shift away from thinking about fixed 'communities', which are assumed to have stable qualities in a particular locale, to the theoretical framework of 'music scenes' (Shank, 1994; Straw, 1991) provided a familiar terminology that blends with colloquial accounts in productive ways. Likewise, music scenes as a realm of investigation have broadened to include the organization of local, trans-local and virtual activities into scene-building understandings (Peterson and Bennett, 2004). However, as commodities have an expiry date when they become exhausted (Straw 2000), so do communities or scenes (Fogarty 2006), and this fleeting quality seems best captured by approaches that embrace, on some level, the phenomenological experience. This involves individual activities and group participation within an eclectic environment of music made possible through recorded music and travelling, migrating and touring musicians.

Analyses of musical taste have been tied to issues of distinction as well as locality. For example, consideration of clubbing in the UK (with a locality centred on London) has focused almost exclusively on 'dance music,' rather than on hip hop or funk clubbing experiences (among others) and has been

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discussed most succinctly in terms of ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton 1995). For this phrase, Sarah Thornton borrows a key concept from the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1984). His original term, ‘cultural capital’, suggested that the things one likes, in other words one’s personal tastes for objects, are culturally determined, and relate to their potential value in the acquisition of status and prestige. Thornton’s contribution was to suggest that ‘subcultures’<sup>3</sup> also have an equivalent way of expressing and conferring status through knowledge and distinction. Bourdieu explains that such educational, and by extension, class, distinctions are notable and methodologically retrievable through an examination of people’s tastes for music and art. The most significant challenge to this theory was Peterson and Kern’s (1996) model of American middle-class tastes, where they suggested that people distinguish themselves now through omnivorous appreciation for a range of things with both low and high-art status.

In a recent article, Antoine Hennion (2007), who suggests elsewhere that taste is analogous to the drug user’s attachment (Hennion and Gomart, 1999), argues that concentration should not be overlooked by sociologists as an aspect of musical tastes. This contributes to his overall shift in direction from thinking of taste as distinction, to thinking of taste as a self-reflexive activity involving moments of appreciation.

The intense pleasure of this effacing of self, to the benefit of a precise gesture, is concentration. The key word for athletes, singers, or pianists, concentration is skirted over too quickly as if it deals with psychology, when actually, it designates the double reduction that intensifies presence: from a whole body to a

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘subculture’ has been challenged in terms of appropriateness. Cf. Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003; HUQ, 2006.

precise gesture, .... The body is revealed in gesture and appears to itself, from whence comes pleasure. (100)

Gesture and somatic cues, and the larger pleasure of effacing the self, are keys to the concept of concentration on things (for example, music or wine). I will have more to say about what dance offers to this consideration of musical tastes later on.

If sociologists have shifted towards the domain of aesthetics, in an attempt to account for the art 'itself,' philosophers have offered little on issues of musical tastes within dance practice. Dancers' perspectives have been neglected in art history more broadly, as well as in the philosophy of dance (aesthetics). Nietzsche (1969) points out that Kant regarded aesthetics from the position of the spectator, rather than from that of the artist, and thus, unconsciously, created a link between the spectator and the idea of beauty. Even in Francis Sparshott's (1995) epic account of dance, he acknowledges that his perspective neglects the view of the insider/participant.<sup>4</sup> In most of the discussions of taste, from Edinburgh's David Hume (1965) to the present sociological accounts of music, the musical tastes of dancers are rarely mentioned. However, Bourdieu (2008) presents a poetic portrait of peasant bachelors who remain unwed and unable to participate fully in dance at local festivities in the place where he grew up, and discusses the way in which this observation of his relates to distinctions of class and their implications for tastes and familial relationships. He argues that men tend to fall behind women

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<sup>4</sup> See Sparshott's (1988) first book about dance for an explanation about why the *neglect* of a particular subject does not necessarily legitimize the need for a particular study.

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in their acquisition of urban tastes when living in rural areas. Rural women have the advantage of magazines to stay current on new trends in fashion and dance. In this way, Bourdieu is accounting for the taste for new dance moves and fashions as a central aspect of geographical migration from rural to urban life, as well as considering the role of particular mediations (magazines) in this acquisition.

In the study of hip hop culture, approaches to thinking about the musical tastes of dancers have only recently emerged as an area of interest. Here, the closer the researcher is to New York City, the less likely it is that mediation is considered as a factor in the scene. For example, Joe Schloss (2006) recently argued from a perspective akin to ethnochoreological or folklore analysis that music is passed along from one generation of b-boys to the next, as part of a cultural tradition in New York City. Jeff Chang (2006) notes that Pop Master Fabel, a participating hip hop dance historian, also has a “folkloric” interest in traditions. Following this, Schloss (2009) suggests that dance experiences in hip hop culture are ‘unmediated’ and need to be experienced in person.

On the other hand, in France, Roberta Shapiro (2004; 2008) demonstrates how French society began to develop mediated discourses about hip hop dance as an art form, and compares this with a lack of similar developments in the United States. Isabelle Kauffmann (2004) deals explicitly with the emergence of dance in France with mediated representations, arguing from a perspective more akin to that of the dancers themselves. I argue elsewhere that in the UK, dance workshops provide a space where cross-cultural musical exchanges occur that change and inform the development of



students' tastes, in ways that provide both aesthetic negotiations and tensions for participants (Fogarty 2010).<sup>5</sup>

B-boys are boys, or men, who 'break' and likewise, b-girls are girls or women who 'break.' The term 'breakdance' is still used by some people, most often by old school 'breakdancers' from the early 1980s, members of the general public, dancers with English as a second language, or dancers in the UK who are indifferent to the cultural codes and meanings of the original dancers. As Sally Banes (1994) explains, when she asked kids about their practice of breakdancing in the 1980s, they said it's "when you crazy on the floor" (p. 129). The original meaning of a b-boy was someone who 'breaks' - makes a short, but spectacular series of specialised dance moves - on the 'break' of a record - that part in a song where the musicians give themselves a moment of freedom within the composed structure; a moment extended by the improvisational techniques of the DJ.

The early dance, as done in New York City, was a type of game called a battle. It was about a relationship between music and dance done in the social environment of a party by the 'outsiders'; those that were willing to take risks and look crazy by doing a different kind of dance. When dancers from New York City toured, they originally did so with hip hop artists such as Afrika Bambaataa or with their own music. Later, when dancers toured in the 1990s, they did so with theatrical companies, such as the pioneering group, GhettoOriginals (Fogarty 2010). Although the dancers were performing onstage, the 'real'

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<sup>5</sup> Accounts of global hip hop culture always mention the media representations of the dance worldwide. Cf. Kopytko 1986; Mitchell 1996; Deyhle 1998; Condry 2001; Pennay 2001; Levy 2001; Osumare 2002; Shapiro 2004; Hoyler and Mager 2005)

Appendix E. Musical wastes & tastes: Experiencing music in urban dance practice

performances still took the place of battles and cyphers<sup>6</sup> that happened after the theatre performance. Thus DJing and breaking have always placed each other as complementary activities. If the stage was the original rupture of this intense relationship between the forms of music and dance for hip hop culture, then the transitions of one generation of dancers to the next has provided a secondary disjuncture of tastes as trends fade and new music emerges.

In this article, I propose that dance is not just about the body, or a metaphor for musical activity and participation<sup>7</sup>, but also involves issues of listening, concentration and even possible inactivity. These moments happen at the intersection of intermediaries invested in mutually affecting aesthetic judgements. At the same time, the discussion also concerns the repeated pleasures involved in bodily experiences of music, and the pleasures and challenges experienced while performing musical tastes for others. As Owe Ronström (1999) points out, participants casually share the pleasures of dance with ethnographers, and yet, "... they may carry intense meaning and significance" (p. 135). As an ethnographer and practicing b-girl ("breaker"), my

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<sup>6</sup> Freestyling means to improvise and can be used to describe rapping, breaking or even extreme sports such as BMXing. Breaking, or b-boying/b-girling, is not as improvised as most accounts suggest. B-boys and b-girls do prepare for battles. Battling is competition and whether formal or informal there are evaluations by all involved about who won and lost. When you cypher, whether in music or dance, the context is more about sharing and keeping the energy and mood high, rather than judging or comparing performers in a more explicit manner under the guise of competition. The online "Urban Dictionary" captures the meaning of the term cypher best: "To freestyle but not in battle terms." <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=cypher> (Accessed July 18, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Dance scholar, Anna Pakes (2006), convincingly explains that discussions about dance do not necessarily disturb mind/body dualism. For example, dancers have minds as well as bodies, and often distinguish practices in ways that reinforce this mind/body dualism, rather than dismantle this approach.

choices to seek out musical experiences that were pleasurable led me to engage with particular club nights and patrons whose activities, although leisure-related, were not trivial in meaning.

I am considering dancing in clubs as a type of performance, because it is: there are clearly spectators of various sorts, and a performative intention on the part of the dancers involved. I do not want to introduce here a typology of dance performances (this is part of a larger project), however, there are various types of performances within the club setting that can be differentiated even further: from dancing for yourself, to performing for friends, to dancing with a circle around you watching (a convention of b-boying<sup>8</sup>), to dancing when there is a circle of people watching that includes the girl you happen to like or a b-boy you are trying to impress. Then there is also dancing to music you love, music you like and music you hate (and here the performances often consist of articulating this loathing, or dancing politely so as not to offend friends).

### **Edinburgh b-boy/b-girl scene snapshot**

The themes for discussion will be addressed here through a local ethnography<sup>9</sup> concerning cultural practices of global hip hop culture's eminent dance: breaking (or b-boying/b-girling). I interviewed many of the adult dancers in the Scottish scene, as well as dancing with them at practices, and against them in competitions. These interviews were semi-structured, and

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<sup>8</sup> See Schloss' (2009) *Foundation* for an overview of some basic b-boy terminology and cultural contexts from a recent New York City study. See Ken Swift for further clarification and accuracy.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of how dance scholars initially approached the ethnographic study of dance see Frosch 1999.

typically lasted an hour with dancers, and thirty minutes with club promoters (DJs) and event organizers (who were also dancers). Interviews typically took place at local coffee shops, pubs or other public spaces. I met the first breaker I interviewed at Dance Base<sup>10</sup>, who told me about various club nights and possible practices. As I attended practices and events, I eventually met and spoke with all of the dancers in the local scene at this time (2007), either formally or informally. I interviewed event organizers first, as I was interested in the topic of musical selection, and it is event organizers who pick the DJs for local breaking events. I use the term “intermediaries” throughout to describe the role of DJs and organisers who make musical choices for others during club nights.

As an outsider to the scene at first, I was regarded with some scepticism until I had battled (“competed”) at a local club event for b-boys and b-girls. After that event, the b-boys and b-girls were clearer about my “role” as a practitioner in the scene.

Alongside this engaged research, I spoke with other everyday participants related to the breaking scene, as well as to city dwellers including social workers, contemporary dancers, ushers, touring dancers and club goers about their experiences with b-boys and b-girls (defined later). I chose Edinburgh, Scotland as a starting point for this study because that was where I was living at that time, 2007.

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<sup>10</sup> *Dance Base* is Scotland’s National Centre for Dance and is based in the Grassmarket area of Edinburgh.

I began to notice the significance of various informal conversations that I had with club goers at the club nights who were out to dance and to drink. Through their remarks, I began to develop the concept of musical wastes. For example, club goers would often approach me as I was dancing to request I ask the DJ to change the music to a song or genre they preferred. They did this because they felt I would have more capital or influence with DJs. This assumption was based on my 'serious' dance skills. Club goers efforts to solicit my support for their musical requests as a fellow club goer became an amusing aspect of the ethnography. Eventually, I realized the theoretical implications for such an informal assumption. As a foreign ethnographer I began playing the role of intermediary between musical tastes and this was due to my dance practice. The contempt club goers felt for the music also inspired the development of a framework for thinking through issues of musical wastes.

#### **"It's like that"**

"You should come out dancing with us at...[He names the venue]. We really like the music the DJ plays, but we have to hide from him because as soon as he sees us dancing he'll put on something bad like, *It's like that*."

This anecdote, shared with me by a b-boy about his clubbing experiences in Edinburgh, Scotland, is quite a lively example of the intersection of musical tastes with dance practice. It's obvious from this exchange that while the clubbing experience is about enjoying music (Malbon, 1999), musical aversions are also a part of that experience.

This Edinburgh dancer likes the musical choices of the DJ, until the DJ sees b-boys and decides to play music for them. At the particular venue mentioned above, the DJ played more contemporary music than was played by the DJs of Mumbo Jumbo and Motherfunk (two club nights I will describe a bit later on). When this particular DJ tries to play music that he imagines will be enjoyable for the b-boys or b-girls (or which will locate them in the right musical context) he gets it wrong. The younger b-boys prefer to dance to current popular music rather than 'old school' funk or hip hop tracks. The miscommunication between dancers and DJs in Edinburgh was a dominant feature of the local club scene, making this the perfect case study for a consideration of the musical wastes produced by intermediaries of music and what these demonstrate about the ontological make-up of hip hop dance.

In Edinburgh, clubs were not the centre of the b-boying scene. Dancers trained at a variety of daytime practice spots from racquetball courts, to Dance Base. There were about four 'generations' of dancers around in Edinburgh and some cross-pollination with the Glasgow hip hop scene. B-boys made up a very small majority of the club goers in Edinburgh. The events that were organized at this time happened on special club nights where dancers would compete formally in 'battles' (what b-boys call competitions) often with out of town guests. Those b-boys in their early twenties that did frequent clubs to dance, and drink, did not necessarily acquire any obvious subcultural capital - considering that most of the 'serious' older b-boys did not attend clubs to break. Although the known participating club dancers could get in for free, and were rewarded with free beer that the devoted funk DJs used to entice b-boys to their

nights, they were not necessarily respected or appreciated by the paying clientele of the club. The DJs held more economic and aesthetic power in the situation (Straw, 1995), through their popularity and their brand attachments to particular musical styles and named club nights; the clientele who came to drink also wielded quite a powerful influence through their expendable income. It was also not uncommon for the clientele of clubs to feel frustration about various musical selections of the DJ<sup>11</sup>. That's nothing new to the history of recorded music in leisure venues. But this does raise some issues about the relationship between local dancers and DJs, ruptures between their musical tastes, and communications based on knowledge produced in centres elsewhere.

In Edinburgh, as the remark of the dancer that began this section indicates, the battle over musical tastes is not amongst b-boys or breakers, where disagreements about musical taste have a different ambit, but rather between dancers and DJs, and the leftover effects of this problematic relationship constitute what can only be regarded as musical waste. And this statement is, after all, about a judgment that comes from my consideration of hip hop's cultural significance as popular form of expression consisting of music, dance, and art, along with Bambaataa's add-ons: "peace, love, unity and having fun."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> When I was at the club, (mostly female) patrons would often try to entice me to assist them on their mission to get the music the DJ played changed to music they would prefer. They assumed because I was a 'breaker' I would have more sway with the DJs. As a researcher, I would always take this opportunity to find out the musical tastes of the female patrons!

<sup>12</sup> Afrika Bambaataa quote from *The Freshest Kids* (Israel 2002).

### **Who is listening?**

Dancers in a club engage in an activity that is, as dance scholar Clare Parfitt would suggest, “a popular dance practice...whose low-art status and supposed triviality often disguise the workings of highly complex historical and cultural processes.”<sup>13</sup> On some levels, the dancers I shared space with believe that they are performing only for themselves and each other, within a tradition with a history and a global significance.

But performances always have audiences, and for dance, especially in an urban dance club setting, the way that someone dances can also amplify, alter, frustrate or enhance the listening experience of the spectator, in many cases creating an experience for both the dancer and the spectator that effectively draws out and emphasizes an aspect of the song. This provides a setting where musical tastes can be in conflict: for example those of the DJ, the dancers and the various members of the audience. Thus any particular, danced expression of musical taste may have a complex position, meaning and genesis, involving both use and waste.

For spectators of dance in clubs (especially connoisseurs or enthusiasts involved in a scene), music is wasted for two main reasons. On the one hand, if one’s own personal pleasure is negated by experiencing music that one is adverse to then music is wasted in an abstract sense. On the other hand, if one is not dancing but instead watching someone else dance, music is wasted if there is a lack of concentration on, or attention to, the music on the part of the

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13 From Clare Parfitt’s Academia.edu profile: <http://chi.academia.edu/ClareParfitt> (accessed June 3, 2010)



performer. Spectacular popular dance performances are often accused of this and sometimes the ideology of this criticism, alongside contemporary assumptions of what constitutes 'art' dance, overrides the actual merits of performance. A spectator of dance may get frustrated by a dancer who does not seem to be listening to and expressing the music, but is instead seen to be just doing tricks. However, musicality is a value judgment (Fogarty 2010) which presupposes a commonality and set of cultural norms for listening, interpretation and expression.

This sort of concentration on music relates to non-dance listening activities. For example, if a person is by himself/herself, listening to a song, but gets distracted, he/she may choose to start the song over again to concentrate on it in its entirety. For dancers, the difficulty of acquiring moves can often be a temporary distraction. In other words, while a dancer is training to become technically proficient at a move they cannot always give full concentration to the music. Instead, they may be, at best, only *half-listening*. When a dancer is technically able to do the move, the next step in their aesthetic development involves being able to do the move to the music. This involves sonic concentration and movement articulations. This illustrates that musicality as judged by the spectator is not always warranted when thinking through the work involved in any given dance practice.

Music is also considered wasted if the desired action to accompany the music is not performed. The best example is the experience of anyone in a club whose favourite song comes on while they are waiting in line for a drink or for the toilet. Waste here involves the delay of pleasure, informed by past

experiences and memories of enjoyment. Dancers who want to 'go off' to the music may also be frustrated when there is not adequate space or the right social context necessary for them to dance. Musical waste, then, involves not only evaluations of what is good and bad music, but also an account of what experiences can be achieved through an embodied relationship and engagement with music.

Professionals of varying degrees in the music industry also experience wasted music. A headlining DJ may get frustrated if the opening DJ plays a great song before the room has filled out to maximize the social effects of this tune. In other words, music is considered wasted if it has no audience or the 'wrong' audience (here there is an evaluative judgment made involving likeminded aesthetic tastes). Also, if the music is not loud enough or the bass is not pumping through the body, some dancers may feel that some ideal listening experience is being denied. This has an unlikely resemblance to those that prefer to listen in the confines of their home from the premium position in the room<sup>14</sup>.

To say that 'it's a waste' to hear a good dance song with no one dancing to it, speaks to the performative and social status of music, as well as to the ontological meanings of dance. Both the pleasures of experiencing music, and the experience of wastes, in a variety of forms are new areas for consideration, with the potential to reveal how tastes are experienced and expressed. Musical tastes, and wastes, are phenomenological: about bodies and senses. If wasted moments of music are experienced as frustrations, as in listening to great beats

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<sup>14</sup> See Keightley (1996) for an interpretation of the significance of high fidelity equipment in the domestic space for men and the symbolic division between males and females in normative, heterosexual relationships.

without having the opportunity to express oneself through dancing, then those lost moments are about anticipated bodily responses and memories of past pleasures.

Music might even be wasted if it produces a different effect to what was intended by an intermediary. In this case the music produces no pleasure and is not enticing. Or the opposite, an intermediary may be frustrated if they are sharing music, say, to intentionally upset or irritate the listener, but instead the music is simply enjoyed. Both of these examples speak to the intentions of participants, but musical waste is peculiarly centred on negated desires such as sensation seeking or maximizing moments, rather than being solely a performance of distinctions. Dance practice reveals this point from a different angle. In dance practice – the preparation for dance performance – failed attempts are seen as steps towards success and achievement. The only times that dance experience is described in terms of waste are when a dancer does not fulfil someone else's expectations for their potential. That is to say, the final layering of performance and reception, and this includes elements of recognition, status and validation by others. It is never enough to have danced brilliantly in a moment; the moment must also have been recorded.

### **Place is the new taste**

In Edinburgh, personal distinctions of musical taste are not the only factors that inform the choices that club goers make about where they will go out dancing. Distinctions of taste and waste are also applied to areas of the city, and reveal social relations on a larger scale. For example, music is wasted if the

club where it is heard is located inside a district of town associated with an inappropriate crowd, or class, of people.



This flyer emphasizes the mix of genres to be expected at Motherfunk.

Most club nights in Edinburgh, intended for a dance crowd, will advertise a particular eclectic and hybrid mix of styles. Getting the right crowd is about location and night, as much as it is about the DJ and the right concoction of musical mixes (and mixed drinks), but I love the descriptive tones of the musical genres presented (“heavy” “deep” “sweet” “real”). “Real” in relation to this hip-hop flyer is not so much about location as it is a value judgment about tastes (“real” always means “good” according to the selector.)

Edinburgh's local promotional tool, *The List*<sup>15</sup>, suggests that: "Since way back in 1996 Motherfunk has been Edinburgh's only serious Tuesday night clubbing option. Gino and Fryer supply a formidably knowledgeable repertoire of all that's great and good about funk" and "Gino and Fryer are back with their Tuesday institution as they spin rare and classic funky assed, floor-shaking 60s and 70s grooves, deep funk, Latin, soul and so much more."<sup>16</sup> Local graffiti writer, Elph, who recently had a solo exhibit at a gallery in Edinburgh and has also been shown internationally alongside Banksy and others in New York City, did the artwork for the flyer. The DJs have arranged for the b-boys to get a free case of beer to come dance every Tuesday, which is why the younger dancers come out for the night. This is the DJ's way of establishing the club night as 'real': an authentic location where serious dancers gather.

Motherfunk had already switched locations to the Opal Lounge by the time I arrived in Edinburgh for research. The Opal Lounge is located in the 'New Town' of Edinburgh and is self-described as, "Edinburgh's leading night club", and as such:

... Appeals to a more discerning audience - those who appreciate that little bit extra. Open 7 nights a week, Opal Lounge creates the perfect atmosphere for anyone looking to unwind in style. A selection of highly-respected resident DJs lay down a sumptuous blend of classic dance tracks, current club favorites and some soul, funk and R'n'B to get the party started, while the quality surroundings and exclusive drinks offers place Opal Lounge firmly at the cutting edge of the city's late-night scene.  
At Opal Lounge we believe in offering a luxury nightclub

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<sup>15</sup> *The List*, a popular website that circulates information and provides an online guide to what's happening in Edinburgh, Scotland for the arts. <http://www.list.co.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.list.co.uk/event/50575-motherfunk/> (accessed July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009)

experience that will ensure an unforgettable night for you and your guests.<sup>17</sup>

The Opal Lounge is located in the New Town on George Street, between Hanover Street and Frederick Street. According to promotional material for the City of Edinburgh, the New Town and Old Town create a “remarkable juxtaposition of two clearly articulated urban planning phenomena”<sup>18</sup>. The Old Town features the Edinburgh Castle and “the Royal Mile.” The Royal Mile begins at the entrance to the Castle and ends at the gates to Holyrood Palace near Arthur’s Seat, an extinct volcano that now offers a view of both the sea and Edinburgh’s Parliament Building. The Bongo Club, another venue offering funk music suitable to b-boying, is located not far from the Royal Mile. This area serves now as the central tourist attraction of Edinburgh and shops along the way are filled with kilts and other paraphernalia.

Motherfunk, as a club night, was originally based in the Old Town but the promoters and DJs moved the night to the New Town. On occasion during my research at the new spot, club goers would explain to me that they used to go to Motherfunk all the time but stopped when the night moved venues. The Opal Lounge, where the night was then based, was seen as too ‘posh’ and ‘trendy’ for the crowds that used to frequent and support the night.

At Motherfunk there are also images to accompany the dancers. Flickering on the wall of the club are images from the 1970s episodes of the American television program: *Soul Train*. The flyers also feature Black women,

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.opallounge.co.uk/> accessed July 2, 2009

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO World Heritage site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/728> Accessed July 18, 2010

as does the reference to Mother Funk, and this is a trait of the artist who makes the illustrations (Elph). In this location, this representation connotes a 'throwback' to another time, yet in a place far away. Nostalgia is inevitable. But here it's nostalgia for the memories of the African American 'other'. If the clientele that are dancing aren't hip enough, there are always the mediated images of funky dancers in 70s attire to dance along to the DJs selections and to keep them company on those nights when the club is dead, or at least late to fill up.

When the club is full of patrons, there is no room or atmosphere for the b-boying to go off. Music is wasted for dance because there isn't the space (in the form of a circle of onlookers and dancers awaiting their turn) required for b-boying. The clientele are there to dance and let loose, and they need the space that the b-boys would also require to get dancing. In the world of bar nights, those buying alcohol have the cultural capital and DJs cater to them. B-boys have none, unless the particular crowd of a random night happens to be excited to watch some breaking.

## Headspin in the Old Town





Headspin flyers used by permission of Colin Miller. Cover design by Elph.

At Headspin and Mumbo Jumbo (two nights at the Bongo Club in the Old Town),<sup>19</sup> I hear all kinds of music: hip hop, funk, breaks, drum'n'bass, house, soul, reggae, funky rock, and indie dance. Colin Millar explains that he plays “basically anything I like but it has to be funky and that's mainly hip hop, early-mid 70s funk and up-tempo break beat/b-boy tunes.”<sup>20</sup> About his choices for music, Millar explains:

I do not set parameters on what I play although I don't play things that I like but I don't think people will be able to catch onto instantaneously as you don't get a second chance to get people up dancing so anything a bit too out there is not something I would play. I know plenty of people who don't think this is an issue but I'm not really there to educate people.

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<sup>19</sup> See a sample of track listing by DJ Colin Millar at: <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=56710188&blogId=225192910>

<sup>20</sup> Personal correspondence with Colin Millar July 9<sup>th</sup> 2009.



Club goers also don't get a second chance to dance to parts of a song. If a good song comes on, the dance floor is where to be or the song is wasted. Unless the client is too "wasted" himself or herself to notice that the music has been transformed to background noise for a quality conversation outside the venue<sup>21</sup>.

Colin had a comprehensive understanding of music that was preferred by b-boys in various global hip hop contexts, from the early 1980s breaking mania to present day competitions. His knowledge came through his attendance at b-boy events, his role assisting b-boys in their musical mixes for theatrical shows, and his spectatorship of international b-boy battles. He also grew up purchasing hip hop mix tapes and records and listening to hip hop shows and John Peel's show on the radio. The younger local b-boys who liked to club at this time, however, had a unique musical preference that moved them into different clubbing domains removed from hip hop's roots.

### **Moving from the new to the old: recycling 'flavour'**

There is a small group of younger dancers in their early 20s around 2007 that are out at the clubs and most of them are attending Motherfunk around this time (so a rather small group). Often I would see the dancers leaving the club after the free beer had all been drunk. I stay on and keep dancing most nights. After the b-boys have gotten to know me over time, one night, I am invited to join the dancers at another club night and thankfully have an opportunity along

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<sup>21</sup> Smoking is not permitted in the venues in Scotland at this time. Most clubs provide a smoking area behind the venue.

the way to tell them more about my research project and ask them some questions. That night set my research off in various directions.

The b-boys were headed to a club in the Old Town called Cabaret Voltaire, which is described in *The List* as a: “Twin roomed subterranean venue set into the caverns of the Old Town with a musical programme that covers all aspects of underground music 7 nights a week.”<sup>22</sup> There they dance to jungle music all night. They explain that they attend Motherfunk for the free beer and then head here because they like the music better. Seeing some of them dance to the music explains to me the high energy, frenetic pacing of their dance styles.

These dancers enjoyed dancing most to music that was not conventionally understood by me to be appropriate for breaking. Their musical tastes were not passed along from an older generation of dancers and reflected the present state of their club going status. Although they danced to music at the funk night (none of which was straight break beats), they preferred a different club in the Old Town. In one setting they were motivated by the free beer and free warm-up practice space, but quickly made their way across the city to a different venue because of the music.

This is not quite a distinction of how music is passed along, but is more a distinction between the musical tastes of dancers and of DJs, as well as of the ways in which the choices of music affect those relations. Breakbeats were actually introduced ‘back’ into global breaking culture.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.list.co.uk/place/15927-cabaret-voltaire/>  
accessed July 2, 2009

<sup>23</sup> This is often credited to the late DJ Leacy, a British DJ of Irish descent who played at many central international b-boy/b-girl events.

During one battle in Scotland I witnessed, a Polish dancer in his early 20s who had been living in Glasgow (and traveled to Edinburgh for this event) danced in a battle where he didn't like the music the DJ was playing. He was verbal about his distaste and also gestured to the DJs, asking them to change the music; that he couldn't dance to this. The DJs looked annoyed but one of them changed the track.

Later, one of the DJs in Edinburgh, who is also a dancer, would also describe to me how he doesn't feel that the b-boys who were event organizers respect what he does; the Edinburgh b-boys don't appreciate the work of DJ culture. He expressed his feeling that the b-boys think he is just a dumb, drunk DJ. He felt that the dancers don't acknowledge the work that he puts into his craft. Also, the practices of various age groups and social groups of dancers and DJs are rather pronounced. Some of the older dancers, especially, have moved into theatre performances, influenced by the precedent set by b-boy Storm in Germany (whom they name as an influence). Their bodies have become finely tuned instruments; alcohol is an unnecessary injury waiting to happen, so they don't get wasted. They practice during the day for battles, gigs and theatre productions and the quest for new music isn't mentioned in their accounts of their dance practice.

However, the younger dancers in Edinburgh are displaying contradictory musical tastes: at Motherfunk performing the selections of the DJs for free beer, and at Cabaret Voltaire expressing their own choices for music (mainly jungle). Although these tastes are not necessarily shared between various generations of dancers and DJs, and certainly don't reflect the musical tastes of dancers in

other places, this may in fact be a demonstration of the range of musical choices made by dancers, and not always just an exceptional case of aesthetic wastes.

### **Imagining music and moving to listen**

"When I imagine a piece of music, something I do every day & often, I 'always I think' rhythmically grind my upper & lower front teeth together. I have noticed it before but usually it takes place quite unconsciously. Moreover it's as though the movement produced the notes in my imagination. I think this way of hearing music in the imagination may be very common. I can of course also imagine music without moving my teeth, but then the notes are much more blurred, much less clear, less pronounced" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 32e).

So far, I have considered tastes in b-boying from the perspectives offered by various participants in club culture, including DJs, dancers and club promoters, although these, like me, are both participants and spectators. Now I want to explore what spectators perceive when they encounter dance and music together. When someone dances we often see them as representing or embodying the music, or their identity, or some combination of both. More interestingly, however, if I watch someone dance I may be able to guess what aspect of the music he or she is concentrating on, or emphasising. They may be following a melody on a particular instrument with their body or hitting beats of the rhythm section, and this may reveal, or confirm, important perceptual qualities in the music.

When watching another dancer, the aesthetic evaluations include not only the quality of their movement, and their skill/execution, but in hip hop culture, also their ability to relate those movements to the music. At practices, b-boys, rather than a DJ, tend to control the musical selection, so people who like

the same music will practice together. Wittgenstein (1967) describes how he would know more about someone else's aesthetic tastes not through what they say but through their gestures; how often they wipe off a picture for example to look at it. A b-girl from Scotland described for me what she liked about seeing a member of her crew dance. She said that although she has already heard the song that he is dancing to, every time he dances she'll hear new things in the music that she hadn't noticed before.

There are two things to say about this comment. First, there is an element of repetition here - she has already heard the song - maybe countless times before. Second, it's not that the b-girl isn't listening to the music or concentrating hard enough on the song and needs a dancer to reveal the song, but rather, that she is noticing an aspect. Her spectatorship then is tied both to her musical taste, and to her appreciation of the music as the dancer reconstructs it for her.

What are we concentrating on when we listen to music? This question becomes more complex when we think: what are we concentrating on when we see dance and hear music? People dance to music that suits their taste, but their taste in music to dance to is determined by their dance practice, their social group and the choices of the DJ. In other words, music is evaluated in terms of questions like: Can I dance to this? Does this make me want to move? However, nobody wants to dance alone, so the collective taste is a more powerful influence.

Dance practice is also evaluated by musical criteria. What makes a good dancer? Their ability to dance on beat, or to help us notice aspects in the music

that we otherwise wouldn't have noticed, and finally if they can surprise us by expressing qualities in the music when we least expect it, in the midst of a high pressure situation with all sorts of unpredictability and stresses such as experienced in competitions. Here dance is clearly an individual taste performed. As this case study has demonstrated, intermediaries assemble taste performances in ways that confuse the meaning, but also recycle wasted meanings of music and dance.

As I mentioned earlier, for dancers to acquire the skills necessary to begin to engage with the music on a level of aesthetic expression, they inevitably have moments of training that involve *half-listening*. Where dancers believe that club nights can be used as a mere warm-up (with free beer) for another club night where they may end up, this process of half-listening may be apparent to the spectator. When I saw the younger b-boys dancing to jungle music at the second venue, I became instantly aware that the type of listening performed through their dance practice involved a sincerity of musical tastes. Their love of jungle music changed the energy of their interaction and devotion to a self-pleasuring performance. In Scotland, far removed from the birthplace of hip hop culture, younger participants had reorganized the dance to suit their contemporary club going experiences and collective musical tastes. My own inability to share musical tastes with them, being much more inline with the funk and hip hop DJs of the first venue, was both a cross-cultural distinction and a generational one as well.

## Conclusion

I have attempted to demonstrate that the performance of musical tastes through dance involves many participants (from DJs, dancers, and out of town visitors, to video directors, promoters and graffiti artists) and that each creates a variety of musical meanings in relation to dance practice. On the one hand, when the b-girl notices an aspect of the music during her crewmember's performance this highlights how she takes away something new from her aesthetic experience of the music by watching someone else dance to it. On the other hand, the disjuncture that the Polish b-boy pointed out, between his tastes and the tastes the DJ imagines him to have, is most apparent when the dance does not express the value of, or bear a resemblance to the music, for the participants. Also, importantly (and in opposition to Kant's archaic aesthetic foundations), the disjuncture is felt by the participant dancer themselves, in the act of performance.

Musical waste, as discussed here, is phenomenological and about an experience of 'good' music that isn't enjoyed, or 'bad' music that wastes a moment or a place. In actuality, it is relegated to the same obliteration, out of sight and mind, as 'wasted' products and materials. And it also reminds us, as dance practice always should, that the body itself is not sustainable and will eventually decompose, like the styles tastes and expressions it embodies. As thinking about dance reveals the body, it has the potential to do so in ways that work beyond mere metaphor, and this is one reason that sociologists should not neglect dance as they consider the nature of musical meaning.

What I have tried to reveal here is the complexity of a view of taste as collectively performed, where intermediaries' choices are as central to the pleasures and performances of musical tastes by dancers as the tastes and choices of the dancers themselves. This performance of taste contains fault lines and disjunctions, which reveal how music can be experienced as waste. And this research leads to some important questions for urban aesthetics: How does listening to music while watching someone dance alter the listening experience? How does listening to music whilst dancing change the listening experience? And finally, why is it that *recorded* music can be experienced so profoundly in terms of wasted moments?



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